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The Work and Welfare of Children of Agricultural Laborers

In Hidalgo County, Texas

by Amber Arthun Warburton
Helen Wood and
Marian M. Crane, M. D.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
CHILDREN'S BUREAU
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
FRANCES PERKINS, Secretary
CHILDREN'S BUREAU
KATHARINE F. LENROOT, Chief

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,
CHILDREN'S BUREAU,
Washington, July 15, 1943.

MADAM: There is transmitted herewith The Work and Welfare of Children of Agricultural Laborers in Hidalgo County, Texas, the report of a survey made in 1941 of the employment and living conditions of 342 families of farm laborers and of the work, school opportunities, and health of their children.

The survey was undertaken by the Industrial Division, with the cooperation of the Division of Research in Child Development of the Children's Bureau and the Office of Education, Federal Security Agency. The sections of the report concerned with the schooling of the children were prepared with the advice and assistance of Walter H. Gaumnitz, Ph. D., specialist in rural education of the Office of Education, who made a parallel study of school-enrollment problems in the areas visited and provided part of the information on education.

The study was planned and carried out under the general direction of Elizabeth S. Johnson, assistant director in charge of research in the Industrial Division of the Bureau, and Mrs. Savilla Millis Simons, specialist in charge of the special-studies unit of the Division. The major part of the planning and work on the study was done by Mrs. Amber Arthun Warburton. The report was prepared by Mrs. Warburton and Helen Wood, with assistance from Helen Seymour in the analysis of the family data. The sections of the study relating to the health of the children and community health services were made under the direction of Katherine Bain, M. D., Director of the Division of Research in Child Development; M. Eleanor Blish, M. D., conducting the field work; and Marian M. Crane, M. D., writing these sections of the report.

The Children's Bureau is greatly indebted to the agricultural workers in Hidalgo County, who provided much of the information on which this report is based, and to the interpreters who assisted in the family interviews. Special acknowledgment is made to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture; to the Texas State Employment Office and its staff in the localities visited; to the Texas Department of Public Welfare; to the Texas State Department of Education and the school officials and teachers of the areas studied; and to the State and local health officials, who contributed information and advice in the planning and in the conduct of the field work.

Respectfully submitted.

KATHARINE F. LENROOT, *Chief.*

HON. FRANCES PERKINS,
Secretary of Labor.

The Work and Welfare of Children of Agricultural Laborers

PRESENTING THE STUDY

Our country—in the midst of total war—is shouldering the gigantic task of producing food for our people at home and for our armed forces and allies abroad. To help meet the manpower shortage, hundreds of thousands of our boys and girls are eagerly taking their places on the agricultural production front. Their work is vitally important. But the employment of these youngsters on large-scale farms offers its own peculiar dangers. Under what conditions can these young people do their full part in the war effort without harm to their health and well-being?

In the present national emergency the findings of this study of young agricultural workers in Hidalgo County, Tex., assume a significance perhaps even greater than in 1941 when the survey was made. For they point up the grave difficulties that may arise when boys and girls are employed in agriculture under conditions determined by customary employment practices, without regard for their needs as children.

In many sections of our Nation, on farms specializing in certain crops—particularly cotton, tobacco, vegetables, berries, and other small fruit—the harvesting is often done by men, women, and children who are hired in family groups. For the children in these families life is very different from the traditional picture of boys and girls working on the home farm. When a child's farm work is supervised by wise adults who regulate the tasks with regard for his strength and skill and do not permit farm chores to interfere with his schooling, helping on the home farm may be a rich and rewarding experience for him. But the employment of children for hire on the large-scale farm too often means long hours of hard, monotonous work with little time during the day for food or rest. Such toil in early youth may be so damaging to a child's health and social outlook that it may show its effects throughout all his later life. Sometimes farm work of this sort interrupts the child's schooling so seriously that he may get little education at all.

Then, too, the low rates of pay and the irregularity of farm employment are two of the chief reasons why children have been drawn into the family working force. Often even when all members of the family work, young and old alike, their combined earnings are not enough to make a decent, healthful life possible for them.

That such substandard conditions of living and working result in a deplorable human waste is becoming more and more apparent.

Draft boards have had to postpone the military service of large numbers of our men and boys. Many have been deferred for illiteracy—largely due to lack of educational opportunities in childhood. Many more have been deferred for preventable physical and mental handicaps that have their roots in poverty, neglect, uncared-for illnesses, and overwork in childhood.

One cause of the low-income levels, poor working conditions, and prevalent child labor found among farm workers in certain parts of our country is the absence of effective legislative control over wages, working hours, and the employment of children in agriculture. Scarcely a beginning has been made in establishing legal protection for farm workers under Federal and State labor laws. The little protection that is given these workers is, in all respects, much more limited than that given to workers in manufacturing and in other nonagricultural industries.[1]

The present study traces a picture of children who have never been protected from employment endangering their physical and intellectual development. Although 2 years have passed since the survey was completed, there is reason to believe that the war has not materially changed the lives of the children of agricultural laborers in Hidalgo County. The local United States Employment Service office in the lower Rio Grande Valley reports slight increases in wages in the past season, but children are still looked upon as an important part of the labor supply. These boys and girls of Hidalgo County continue to work, to miss school, and to live in insanitary homes as they have always done—in war or in peace. And even that is not the whole story. For these conditions are not limited to Hidalgo County alone, but, with some variations, they prevail in many other sections of the country where child labor is employed in large-scale farming.

Today a grateful Nation recognizes that many young people—including large numbers of boys and girls without previous experience in farm work—are making a sorely needed contribution to food production. As the war continues, the number of youngsters employed on farms is certain to increase. But the greater the wartime pressure on children to go to work, the greater must be the efforts of parents and community groups to see that the employment of children on farms is fully safeguarded. Only those boys and girls should be hired who are old enough and strong enough to do farm work. Their tasks must be adequately supervised and their working conditions healthful. The work must not be allowed to interfere unduly with their schooling. Programs should be carefully planned, and all possible protection against overfatigue, illness, and accident should be provided. To permit such conditions as those found among children in Hidalgo County to exist in our wartime employment of young people on farms would be to jeopardize—gravely—both our children's and our Nation's future. We must avoid such irreplaceable loss of human resources for the post-war world. Those hundreds of thousands of boys and girls who are lending their young strength to this vital phase of our struggle for a free world should not be denied their own full birthright of freedom and opportunity.

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[1] The minimum-wage, maximum-hours, and minimum-age laws applying to agriculture are outlined briefly in appendix B, pp. 73–74.

HOW THE STUDY WAS MADE

Hidalgo County, Tex., in the lower Rio Grande Valley, was selected as the place for the study because it is an important specialized farming area where large numbers of children were known to be employed as farm laborers. The purpose of the survey was to make available detailed information on the employment, living conditions, education, and health of children in families dependent for a livelihood on farm labor.

The field workers of the lower Rio Grande Valley, who are chiefly of Mexican background, live in concentrated settlements, segregated from the rest of the community. After consultation with various governmental and other agencies familiar with the industry and schools of the county, the visitors from the Children's Bureau selected for study certain blocks in five small towns of different character and size and certain settlements in the open country near these towns as representative of the areas in Hidalgo County in which agricultural workers live. Visits were made to all households in the selected areas between January 15 and March 28, 1941, when the winter vegetable-harvesting season was at its height and the number of farm laborers resident in Hidalgo County was at a maximum.[1]

Households were included in the study if they had one or more children between the ages of 6 and 18,[2] and if either the economic head of the family or any of the children of these ages had been engaged in agricultural labor[3] for hire on at least 5 calendar days since December 1, 1940. In the areas surveyed there were 342 families,[4] with 998 children between the ages of 6 and 18, who met these criteria. From responsible members of each of these households, information was obtained on family composition; on migration history; on the employment, earnings, and total income of the family during the year preceding the date of interview; and on whether the family had received relief or medical care during the year. In addition, detailed information was recorded on the employment and education of each child between 6 and 18 years of age. Through the cooperation of the local school officials, educational data obtained during the family interviews were verified by the school records, whenever the children's last attendance was in the local schools.

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[1] A preliminary report of this survey was made early in 1942 under the title "Child Labor and Inadequate Family Income" and was published by the Children's Bureau in mimeographed form.

For all parts of the survey, except those relating to health, the field work was done by Charlotte Califf, Ione L. Clinton, Evelyn M. Hughes, Miriam Fuhrman, Bernice Madison, Helen V. Seymour, and Violet Sieder, under the supervision of Savilla Millis Simons and Amber Arthun Warburton.

[2] When throughout this study such expressions as "between 6 and 18 years of age" are used, the period from the sixth to the eighteenth birthday is thought of and therefore 6-year-olds are included but not persons who have passed their eighteenth birthday. Such designations as "6 to 9 years," however, include both children of 6 and those of 9 years of age.

[3] Agricultural labor was considered to include any work for hire performed in the open fields or citrus groves that was directly connected with the cultivation of the soil, such as preparing soil for crops, seeding, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, tying vegetables into bunches, carrying crops to be weighed, or loading the vehicle that transported the crops from the field. Irrigating was considered agricultural labor if performed for a grower but not if performed by an irrigating company. The concept of "for hire" was interpreted to mean for compensation of any kind to whomever payable.

[4] A total of 949 households were visited. Of this number, 532 were families of agricultural laborers. Three hundred and forty-nine families included children between 6 and 18 and met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Seven of the 349 families were omitted from the study because the information obtained from them was not complete.

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Since most of the families visited were Spanish-speaking, interpreters were used in obtaining the information. Considerable care was taken in the selection of these interpreters so as to obtain local persons who would be helpful in gaining the confidence of the families interviewed, who were willing to exercise the patience needed to obtain accurately the detailed information sought, and who appreciated the purposes of this study.

Two supplementary surveys dealing with the families were made at the same time, one by the Division of Research in Child Development of the Children's Bureau and one by the United States Office of Education. A physician from the Division of Research in Child Development of the Children's Bureau made a study of the community health facilities and of the health and medical care of the children in 55 of the families interviewed. Her findings are presented in the concluding chapter of this report.[5] The survey by the Office of Education was concerned with the general effectiveness of the schools that served the areas studied and the effect of migrancy upon the schools and upon the kind and amount of education the children received. Some data from this survey are presented in the section on the schooling of the children.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The 342 families of agricultural laborers in Hidalgo County, Tex., who were interviewed by representatives of the Children's Bureau at the peak of the winter vegetable-harvesting season in 1941 were predominantly Mexican or of Mexican descent, although a number were of non-Mexican heritage, but nearly all the children had been born in the United States. The families worked in the fields, for the most part in family groups, harvesting vegetables and citrus fruits in the winter and spring and cotton in the summer and fall. Since most harvest operations in the area are carried on under a labor-contract system, the families were employed mainly by labor contractors. During the late summer and fall months, when field-labor requirements in the valley are at a minimum, many of the families migrated in "jalopies" or in the crowded trucks of their contractors to follow the cotton harvest to north and west Texas. Nearly all family members, including young children, were able to find work as cotton pickers.

In most households the father and mother and also several children were wage earners. Employment was, however, so irregular and rates of pay were so low that the combined earnings of all the workers from agricultural labor, supplemented to some extent by earnings from nonfarm work, were too small to provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter for the family group. During the year preceding the date of interview, the families had a median cash income from all sources of only $350 to provide for their large households, averaging 6.6 persons. This was considerably less than the minimum annual income of $480 estimated by the Texas Social Welfare Association to be necessary to maintain relief families, averag-

[5] See pp. 52–66.

ing only 4.2 members, at a level of health and decency. Yet very few of the families had received any assistance from public or private agencies during the year.

The pressure of poverty led to the employment of a large proportion of the 998 children and young people between 6 and 18 years of age [1] in the study. More than one-fourth of the children aged 6 to 9 years [1] and four-fifths of those between 10 and 14 worked at some time within the preceding year. Nearly all the boys and girls 14 years of age and over were regular members of the family working force. While the younger children sometimes worked only in cotton picking in the summer and fall months, the older boys and girls generally worked in the fields throughout the year whenever work was available, even in periods when school was in session. This extensive employment of children prevailed among the families of Mexican heritage and also among the families of non-Mexican agricultural laborers.

The work of the children and the adults alike was characterized by irregularity of employment, long hours away from home on working days, and low rates of pay. The amount of employment available varied with the season of the year and with weather and day-to-day conditions in the produce market. At times there might be work on 6 or 7 days in the week, but more often only a few days' work was to be had, and in some weeks there was no opportunity for employment. The length of the workday also varied. Although frequently the workers spent 10 hours or more away from home in connection with their work, they often had only 5 to 8 hours of actual work and spent the remaining hours, for which they received no pay, in waiting for transportation or work assignments, or in traveling to and from the fields.

Normal opportunities for schooling were generally denied these children of agricultural laborers. Of the 837 boys and girls in the study who were between the ages of 6 and 16 years, not quite three-fifths were currently enrolled in school and nearly one-fifth had never been enrolled in school. Only 9 of the 161 youths 16 and 17 years of age were still in school. Very few children enrolled before they were 7, the age at which compulsory school attendance begins in Texas, and a considerable proportion waited until they were 8 or 9 for reasons such as lack of clothing, the schools' refusal to accept some children 6, 7, or 8 years of age, and the attitude of some parents that children of this age were "too young" to attend. Most boys and girls who had reached 14 and many who were 12 or 13 had permanently withdrawn from school, owing chiefly to their families' need for their earnings.

The number of days of schooling of the children who were enrolled was reduced by late entrance in the fall, early withdrawal in the spring, and frequent absences for work during the year. So limited was the children's opportunity to go to school that normal grade achievement was impossible. It was found that nine-tenths of the boys and girls 6 to 17 years of age who had been to school were overage for their grades by 1 to 8 years.

Not only were the children deprived of schooling and forced to assume economic responsibility at an early age, but also they were

[1] See footnote 2, p. 3.

reared in many instances under conditions that threatened their health. Their homes generally had only one sleeping room and a separate kitchen, were too crudely constructed to be weathertight, and often had dirt floors. The younger children usually slept on blankets or canvas on the floor. In the same small room the parents and older boys and girls slept in one or two double beds, with sometimes as many as five persons to a bed. Drinking water was often taken from an irrigation ditch or other contaminated source, and food consisted chiefly of beans, rice, potatoes, and tortillas, with seldom an appreciable amount of milk or green vegetables.

Diarrhea and other illnesses were frequent among the children, owing to the use of contaminated water, the lack of sanitation, and the inadequate protection in their homes against the weather. Few children received any medical care, since their families could seldom afford the services of a private physician and very little free medical care was available in Hidalgo County. In view of the lack of health services and the adverse living conditions, the health of the school-age children was suprisingly good. The rate of infant and childhood mortality in their families, however, was exceedingly high—so high as to suggest that only the sturdiest children survived to school age.

These conditions of low family income, child labor, loss of schooling, and unhealthful surroundings are not peculiar to Hidalgo County, Tex., but are closely paralleled in many parts of the country where agriculture has become specialized and where much of the hired, seasonal farm work is done by women and children.

Such a situation shows that the need is urgent to develop methods of assuring fuller employment and higher wages to agricultural workers; to extend to them the security that has already been achieved for industrial workers; and to afford their children the protection of child-labor standards, adequate opportunity for school attendance, and needed health and other community services. Through such measures the children of agricultural laborers in many places in the United States can be given the opportunities that the Nation owes all its children.[2]

HIDALGO COUNTY AND ITS AGRICULTURAL LABORERS

The scene of our study, the lower Rio Grande Valley, has a long and colorful history, dating back to the time when the land was parceled out as grants from the King of Spain. Until three decades ago, when the first irrigation project was completed, the country was a vast expanse of arid, sparsely populated grazing land. As newly irrigated areas were opened up for cultivation in Hidalgo County, in the southern part of Texas, the character of the country and the life of its people radically changed. For the fertile delta of the Rio Grande River, jutting out into the Gulf of Mexico, has become an important source of vegetables and citrus fruit for the markets of the North and East.

[2] For more detailed recommendations, see pp. 66–74.

As the region developed agriculturally, people came from far and wide to buy land and to plant truck farms, citrus groves, cotton, and other crops. The sizes of the farms and groves vary. Some comprise only a few acres; some are large holdings covering thousands of acres.

The demand for a plentiful and cheap labor supply created by the rapid growth of Hidalgo County in the early days brought Mexicans in large numbers from across the border. Recently Mexican workers also have come from other farm areas in Texas where they had been unable to make a living as tenant farmers and sharecroppers. The relatively few non-Mexican farm laborers in the county are mainly migrants who come for the harvest season from other sections of Texas or who follow the crops in interstate migration.

To care for the business of this thriving agricultural economy, small towns centered around the packing houses and shipping points have sprung up at intervals along the railroad that serves the valley. During the winter months these towns hum with the activity of getting the citrus fruits and the vegetable harvest off to market.

Produce trucks roll along the highways from early morning until late at night. In the morning they are filled with men, women, and children on their way to harvest the crops. By the time the dew is off the ground, clusters of workers in family groups may be seen scattered about the fields. Toward evening the trucks, filled with produce and workers, return to the packing sheds, from which bright lights shine out on the dark highways until far into the night.

Many of the towns of the valley, with their neat, comfortable bungalows, have a pleasant air, with palm trees and bright flowers growing about them. A few have large hotels to attract tourists to the warm sunshine of the Texas midwinter. But each of the towns has also a district on the "other side of the tracks" that stands out in sharp contrast to the more prosperous sections. These settlements have their own main streets, movies, stores, service industries, churches, and elementary schools. They are the communities of Mexican families and those of Mexican heritage, who do most of the farm labor of the area. The streets are but rutted roads, without sidewalks or sewers. The dwellings are generally small shacks or huts, usually of crude construction, with separate kitchens standing by the main shacks. They stand on hard, sun-baked earth. The barrenness of these sections is relieved only by occasional blooms in tiny front gardens (for which the water had to be carried by hand), by clumps of mesquite in the background, and by the people themselves—a vivid, responsive people with a certain gentle dignity and grace.

Some of the agricultural workers of the valley—of both Mexican and non-Mexican background [1]—live in even more primitive surroundings than these—in clusters of huts built along the canals or irrigation ditches, in the open country, or in transient settlements at the fringe of town.

These workers constitute the plentiful supply of farm labor that has contributed to the important agricultural development of the area.

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[1] Hereafter in this study, when the term "Mexican" is used in referring to the labor supply, it will refer to persons born in Mexico or of Mexican descent. It has been estimated that 85 percent of the agricultural workers in the Rio Grande Valley are of Mexican background.

Both the Spanish-speaking and the non-Spanish-speaking field workers are employed for the most part in family groups, although the extent to which women and young children are used in the fields varies with the type of crop. In harvesting citrus fruit, the general practice is to employ only men and older boys, because skill and physical strength are required to pick the fruit from the trees and to handle large quantities of heavy fruit. In the harvesting of cotton and many vegetables, on the other hand, all members of the family, including women, and children as young as 7 or 8 years of age, are employed.

Field-labor requirements in the valley vary considerably during the year. For harvest operations, large numbers of temporary workers are needed, although even in peak seasons the amount of work available varies from day to day and week to week, depending upon the weather, crops, and market conditions. The preharvest operations of planting, irrigating, and cultivating, on the other hand, are mechanized to such an extent that they require relatively few laborers. The peak period of employment for field workers is during the winter vegetable and citrus harvest season. The need for harvest crews decreases in the late spring and early summer months, increases during the cotton-picking season in July and August, and drops to the lowest point in the year between September and November, when no crops are maturing.

Since employment is scarce in the county in the late summer and early fall months, many families trek northward during this period to seek work in other cotton-producing areas of Texas. Often they move to the Coastal Bend area and then along the Brazos River Basin, following the maturing crop northward to central and northern Texas and finally to Lubbock County in the northwestern part of the State. Cotton picking in northern Texas reaches its height in November, and most of the migrants return to Hidalgo County during November or early December in time for the winter vegetable-harvesting season.

Harvesting crews in Hidalgo County, as in many other specialized farming areas, are usually recruited through labor contractors. The vegetable and citrus packing sheds generally purchase a grower's crop while it is still unharvested and pay the labor contractor a fixed rate to gather specified quantities of the produce. The labor contractor recruits his own harvesting crew, transports them to and from the fields, supervises the field work, and pays the workers on a piece-rate basis for the produce harvested. Under the labor-contracting system, neither the grower nor the packing shed has any immediate relationship with the harvest crew. The packing shed instructs the contractor regarding the fields to be harvested and often sets the rates of pay the field workers are to receive. A similar system of labor contracting is used in cotton harvesting. The labor contractor is engaged by the grower or gin operator and paid a flat amount for picking the cotton, weighing it in the field, and hauling it to a gin. From this sum he pays his crew members according to the number of pounds of cotton picked.

The labor contractors, frequently referred to by their workers as "jefes" or "truckeros," are usually former field workers who have managed to buy trucks. They often recruit their crews from their immediate families, their relatives, and neighbors. A family may

work for the same contractor year after year during the vegetable- and cotton-harvesting seasons in Hidalgo County and migrate with him to pick cotton elsewhere in northern Texas. The labor contractor also may work for the same packing shed throughout the season and from year to year. If the contractor is one in whom the packing sheds have special confidence and who therefore receives work whenever any is available, his workers are likely to have somewhat more employment than field workers who depend on less well-established contractors.

THE FAMILIES

Most of the families included in the study had been in the United States for many years, but their segregation in Mexican sections of the towns or in rural settlements meant that they had had little opportunity to learn English or become assimilated into the English-speaking community. Their households were usually large, including many relatives in addition to the immediate family, and thus they followed a pattern of group living characteristic of their forebears in Mexico. Though the number of wage earners in these homes was also large and the earnings of all the workers in a household were pooled, the total family incomes fell far short of the amount needed to supply a decent minimum of subsistence for everyone.

Characteristics of the Families

The great majority (329) of the 342 families in the study were of Mexican stock and were predominantly Spanish-speaking. Many of the adults were born in Mexico, but the children in the study were almost without exception native Americans, born and brought up in Texas. Thirteen families were not of Spanish-speaking heritage. A number of these families, as well as some of the Mexican, were former sharecroppers who became wage laborers after despairing of making a living from farming for such reasons as the death or poor health of the head of the household or inability to cope with the pink boll worm or boll weevil. Consolidation of the family's land with other tenant farms, because with the aid of a tractor the owner could cultivate a larger holding, was another reason why former tenant farmers had become day laborers.

Practically all of the families had lived in Texas continuously during the past year and were legal residents of the State. Most of them considered Hidalgo County their permanent home. Three-fourths of the families, however, had migrated for work at some time in the past, and almost three-fifths had migrated during the preceding year.[1] This migration usually was confined to localities within the State of Texas. Within the past year only 19 of the Spanish-speaking families and 6 other families had either gone from Hidalgo County to look for work outside Texas or come into the county from outside the State (table 1).

[1] For the purpose of this study, a family was considered to have migrated if two or more members of the family moved from a dwelling place in one county to a dwelling place in another county for the purpose of seeking or accepting work or of returning from such work.

TABLE 1.—*Families interviewed, by migratory status during preceding year and cultural background*

Migratory status	Number of families		
	Total	Spanish-speaking	Other
Total	342	329	13
Migratory	202	190	12
From Hidalgo County	160	155	5
To other Texas counties only and back	145	141	4
To other States and back	15	14	1
Into Hidalgo County	42	35	7
From other Texas counties only	32	30	2
From other States	10	5	5
Nonmigratory	140	139	1

The households were typically large, averaging 6.6 persons. One-third had eight or more members and over three-fifths had at least six members sharing the same home and dependent on a common income. Often the families included not only many children but also grandparents and other relatives and sometimes also friends who were considered members of the family group.[2] At times grown children continued to live with their parents after marriage and added their own families to the household.

At the time of interview, the 342 families had a total of 2,258 members present in the home. Of these, 363 (16 percent) were children under 6 years of age; 837 (37 percent) were school-age children between 6 and 16 years old; and 161 (7 percent) were boys and girls of 16 and 17 years. Thus, almost two-thirds of all persons in the families were young people under 18 years of age.

Boys outnumbered the girls among both the children 6 to 15 years of age and among those of 16 and 17 years. The difference, however, was greater in the older group, which included 95 boys and only 66 girls. The comparatively smaller number of girls over 16 present in the families reflects the early age at which these girls of Spanish-speaking heritage marry and are separated from their parental homes.

Family Work and Migration

The high proportion of family members, young and old alike, who had been gainfully employed within the preceding year is indicative of the struggle necessary to earn a livelihood. Nearly three-fifths of the 2,258 family members in the study had worked for hire during the year. Nearly all (95 percent) of the boys and girls 14 to 17 years of age, four-fifths of those between 10 and 14, and more than a fourth of even the children between 6 and 10 had worked at some time in

[2] All persons who were in the household on the date of interview and dependent on a common income were considered family members, with the exception of boarders, lodgers, and guests. Family members not living in the household on the date of interview were not counted, except in the case of an economic head of the family who was contributing to the support of the household although temporarily absent.

the year.[3] In fact, a majority (52 percent) of all the family wage earners were under 18.

The number of wage earners in the individual families was high, averaging 3.8 for all families in the study (table 2). In very large families the number of workers was even greater. In families with 10 or more members the number of workers was in no case less than 4 and often ran as high as 7, 8, or 9 workers.

TABLE 2.—*Number of workers per family, by migratory status of family during year preceding interview*

Number of workers per family	Total		Migratory families		Nonmigratory families	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	342	100.0	202	100.0	140	100.0
1 worker	37	10.8	7	3.5	30	21.4
2 workers	51	14.9	22	10.9	29	20.7
3 workers	64	18.7	34	16.8	30	21.4
4 workers	74	21.6	51	25.2	23	16.4
5 workers	55	16.1	37	18.3	18	12.9
6 workers	34	9.9	28	13.9	6	4.3
7 workers	14	4.1	11	5.4	3	2.2
8 workers	6	1.8	6	3.0		
9 workers	7	2.1	6	3.0	1	.7
Arithmetic average	3.8 workers		4.4 workers		3.0 workers	

Migrant families had a larger number of members who had worked within the past year than families that spent the entire year in Hidalgo County. The average number of wage earners per family was 4.4 for the households that migrated and only 3.0 for the nonmigrant group (table 2). A larger proportion of the young children in migratory families was employed than in nonmigratory families. Moreover, households with many members and therefore many potential wage earners found migration more profitable than did smaller families and were therefore more likely to migrate. As one father said, "There is no money in migrating for cotton picking unless there is a big family."

Because of the criteria used in selecting households for study (see p. 3), all 342 families were employed in field labor at some time between December 1, 1940, and the date of interview early in 1941. Furthermore, most of their families had been employed primarily or exclusively as field laborers throughout the preceding year. They worked in the open fields or citrus groves, planting, cultivating, or harvesting the crops.[4] Only 51 families had engaged in addition in any other kind of agricultural work, such as sharecropping, labor contracting, or farm work not related to crop cultivation.

Although agricultural labor predominated in the families' employment, in half (172) of the families one or more members had also had some nonfarm employment during the year. This nonagricultural work was usually limited in extent, however, as is indicated by the fact

[3] See table 6, p. 20. No information was obtained on the sex of children under 6 years of age.

[4] See p. 3, note 3.

that all except 83 of the 1,315 workers in the study had been employed chiefly [5] or exclusively as farm laborers.

Among the families having nonfarm employment about half (79) reported that some member had worked in a fruit or vegetable packing house or cannery. Packing-shed employment was considered, in comparison with field work, highly remunerative and desirable.

Fifty-two families, including 12 of those who had packing-shed or cannery employment, reported that a member had worked in domestic service. Thirty of the families having nonfarm work of the types already referred to, and 53 other families, had members who had worked at one or more of a variety of miscellaneous occupations, such as washing dishes in a hotel or restaurant, helping in a poolroom or bar, shoeshining, road work, irrigation work, carpentry, and junk collecting. A small number of the families owned trucks, in which they sometimes peddled produce or hauled firewood, and a few families operated small grocery stores or restaurants.

The annual cycle of work activities was much the same for families who remained in Hidalgo County throughout the year as for families who migrated out of the county in search of employment, but those who came into the county from other localities had a more varied work history. The 140 families in the study who had not migrated during the preceding year usually harvested vegetables or citrus fruits from November through June and picked cotton during July, August, and early September. Between the cotton-picking season and the beginning of the next winter harvest, they were able to obtain a little work clearing the cotton fields, planting the winter crops, irrigating, or performing general farm labor. However, 160 families, who also worked in the vegetable and citrus harvests in the winter and spring, left the county during the slack period in the summer and fall, usually to follow the cotton harvest northward. Some of them remained at home for the beginning of the cotton-picking season in Hidalgo County and left as work there became less remunerative; others left soon after the completion of the vegetable harvest in June; but they all returned for the 1940–41 winter harvest. The work and migration of the 42 families who migrated into Hidalgo County from other places during the year is subsequently discussed (pp. 13–14).

Most (146) of the 160 families migrating from the county worked only in cotton picking while away. All but 4, who migrated to the sugar-beet fields, were employed in the cotton fields at some time during the migratory period.

Sometimes families set out for the cotton fields in trucks with a labor contractor and his crew of workers. Others owned "jalopies," in which they traveled, or they went with friends or relatives. When the migratory trek was made in the labor contractor's truck, a flat amount or a percentage of the season's earnings was paid him.

The length of time families were away from Hidalgo County varied from 2 to as many as 40 weeks; the length of the median migratory period was between 13 and 14 weeks. More than four-fifths (132) of the 160 families were away for at least 10 weeks. All but 9 of them, however, returned to the county within 25 weeks, or approximately 6 months.

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[5] For the purposes of this study a worker's chief type of employment was considered that at which he had spent the most time during the year preceding the date of interview.

The migrants usually moved northward from one county to another as the later cotton crops matured. Only one-fifth (30) of the families reported working in only 1 county during the migratory period. The majority (91) worked in at least 3 counties while away, and some (21) worked in 5 or more counties.[6] For most of them, Lubbock County in northwest Texas, some 600 miles from Hidalgo County in south Texas, was the final destination, but some did not go so far as this, and a few (15) followed the cotton harvest into neighboring States.

Severe hardships were often encountered by the families while migrating. En route the cars and trucks in which they traveled were usually crowded with people and sometimes carried, in addition, bedding, food, and other possessions. The trucks were of an open type with no seats, intended for carrying produce rather than passengers.

In the localities in which the migrants worked, rent-free camping space or shacks were frequently provided by the cotton growers or gin operators. Such living arrangements were reported by the families to be makeshift, inadequate, and often unsanitary. One family, for example, said that the crew of which they were a part lived in a large storeroom adjoining a cotton gin. Twenty workers, including men, women, and children, settled in family groups in this room. As the season progressed, the storeroom became increasingly filled with bales of cotton until little space remained for living purposes. Another family that left Hidalgo County for cotton picking in Lubbock County in August, in a contractor's truck carrying 40 men, women, and children, reported that they and others in the crew were forced to camp by the roadside every night until their return in January. The father and mother and their young children, aged 4, 5, 8, and 10 years, slept and ate in the open without shelter of any description, though it rained a great deal during their trip. Of the 21 weeks they were away from home, they lost 6 complete weeks of work because of rain and inability to find employment. In November it rained steadily for 3 weeks. Many in the crew of cotton pickers became ill from exposure during the trip.

The 42 migratory families who came into Hidalgo County from other places during the year comprised several groups. Nineteen had been living continuously in other Texas localities and had never migrated before the year of the study. Most of these new migrants had come directly to Hidalgo County without stopping to work elsewhere. Most of them were impoverished sharecroppers or agricultural wage hands who had become discouraged by low earnings and indebtedness, though 5 had previously had nonagricultural jobs from which they had not been able to make a living.

The remaining 23 families included transients who were continually moving from place to place in search of work and residents of other Texas localities who customarily worked in Hidalgo County during the winter harvest season. Included in the number, too, were some families who did not migrate ordinarily but had happened to come to the county in 1941 because they had heard that work opportunities in the winter harvest were good. A number of the Spanish-speaking

[6] Families were asked to report only movements across county and State lines. Many of them, however, also moved about within the counties to which they migrated.

families, especially among the group that had never migrated before, said they had come to Hidalgo County hoping to establish a home there, although in some instances their earnings since coming to the county had been so slight that they were uncertain as to whether they would be able to remain.

Work and Earnings in the Winter Harvest

The inability of the families to earn a satisfactory living from agricultural work even in periods of peak harvest activity is illustrated by their low earnings in the winter-vegetable harvest. Since the study was made at the time of this harvest, it was possible to obtain particularly detailed information on the families' work and wages in gathering winter vegetables. The information related to the last representative workweek preceding the family interview in which at least one member of the family had worked in the open fields for hire.[7] During this sample week almost all the workers were employed chiefly or exclusively in agriculture, usually as field laborers. Most of them worked in the vegetable fields, gathering, bunching, tying, or crating carrots, beets, or other vegetables, although some were employed in the citrus groves or in other farm and nonfarm work.

The median earnings of the families from all types of employment came to only $6.90 for the week,[8] and one-third of the families earned less than $5 (table 3). For the 262 families who worked exclusively in farm labor during the sample week, median earnings were only $5.95. In contrast, the 80 families with some members employed at nonagricultural jobs had median earnings of $9.95.

TABLE 3.—*Weekly earnings of families in the winter harvest, by type of employment*

Weekly earnings	Families interviewed					
	Total		With agricultural employment only		With agricultural and nonagricultural employment	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	342		262		80	
Earnings reported	337	100.0	258	100.0	79	100.0
Less than $5	111	32.9	102	39.5	9	11.4
$5, less than $10	145	43.0	114	44.2	31	39.2
$10, less than $15	52	15.4	30	11.6	22	27.8
$15, less than $20	16	4.8	7	2.7	9	11.4
$20, and over	13	3.9	5	2.0	8	10.1
Earnings not reported	5		4		1	
Median	$6.90		$5.95		$9.95	

Low rates of pay for field work, together with irregular employment, account for the families' small weekly earnings. Even at the

[7] In most cases, this week of employment occurred in Hidalgo County and was the 7-day period ending with the last pay day preceding the date of interview.

[8] In presenting data on earnings, the average used is the median in all cases, and therefore half the families had earnings above and half had earning below the average presented in each instance.

height of the vegetable harvest, most workers probably averaged about 3 days' work per week. On days when they had employment, they often were away from home from early morning until late at night, but much of this time was unremunerated. Often workers spent several hours waiting at the packing house while the contractor received his orders for the day. Additional time was spent by them in riding to the fields, moving from field to field, and waiting at the end of the day to be taken home.

Even when several members of the family had fairly steady work, their combined labor did not offset the low piece rates. In the Gomez family, for example, which included six boys and their mother and grandmother, the 19-year-old boy, who was considered the chief wage earner, and two of his brothers, aged 17 and 14, worked 6 days during the representative workweek, pulling and tying carrots and beets at 12 cents for 72 bunches. The total working time of the three boys, excluding time off for meals and time spent in transportation, was, therefore, approximately 138 hours. Their combined weekly earnings, paid to the eldest boy, totaled $9.08, considerably more than most families were able to make in 1 week. Their average hourly earnings came to less than 7 cents.

Yearly Earnings

Two-thirds of the families of agricultural laborers in this study earned less than $400 during the year preceding the interview. These earnings represent the total cash earnings received from all types of private employment. The median earnings for the year were only $340, in spite of the comparatively large number of workers per family (3.8). One out of every eight families made less than $200 (table 4).

TABLE 4.—*Total earnings of families during year preceding interview, by migratory status*

Yearly earnings	Total			Migratory families			Nonmigratory families		
	Number	Percent distribution	Cumulative percent	Number	Percent distribution	Cumulative percent	Number	Percent distribution	Cumulative percent
Total	342			202			140		
Earnings reported	327	100.0		194	100.0		133	100.0	
Less than $200	40	12.2	12.2	14	7.2	7.2	26	19.5	19.5
$200, less than $300	87	26.6	38.8	49	25.3	32.5	38	28.6	48.1
$300, less than $400	86	26.3	65.1	51	26.3	58.8	35	26.3	74.4
$400, less than $500	46	14.1	79.2	25	12.9	71.7	21	15.8	90.2
$500, less than $600	24	7.3	86.5	20	10.3	82.0	4	3.0	93.2
$600, less than $700	17	5.2	91.7	11	5.7	87.7	6	4.5	97.7
$700, less than $800	11	3.4	95.1	9	4.6	92.3	2	1.5	99.2
$800 and over	16	4.9	100.0	15	7.7	100.0	1	.8	100.0
Earnings not reported	15			8			7		
Median	$340			$365			$305		

The families who migrated had more employment during September, October, and November than those who remained in Hidalgo County in these months of slack employment and consequently had

larger annual earnings.[9] The median annual earnings of the migratory families were $365, whereas those of the nonmigratory families were only $305. More than one-fourth of the migrant households earned at least $500, whereas only one-tenth of the nonmigrants earned that much.

That the migratory households had, on the average, a larger number of workers per family (4.4) than the nonmigrants (3.0) in part explains their relatively high yearly earnings. Greater earnings from work in the cotton fields of northern Texas were another important factor.

Of the families who migrated, 82 percent earned at least $100 from cotton, 40 percent earned $200 or more, and a few families made as much as $500. On the other hand, only 30 percent of the nonmigratory families earned as much as $100 from work in cotton, and none of them made as much as $250.[10]

The work history and earnings of the Hernandez family were similar to those of many of the other migratory families in this study. The entire family, consisting of the father, mother, and seven children from 3 to 17 years, and one son over 18 years of age, left Hidalgo County on August 1 in a contractor's truck. They stopped to pick cotton in Navarro County for the first 3 weeks in August and then went on to Lubbock County, where they had an additional 12 weeks of employment before they returned home in the middle of November. Six members of the family worked during the migratory period—the father, the eldest son, four other boys, aged 8, 10, 11, and 17 years, and the 14-year-old daughter. The seven workers together earned, on the average, $20 a week during the cotton-picking season. Their total earnings for the migratory period amounted to $300, which was three-fourths of the family's total earnings for the year. During the vegetable season, only the two older boys worked with their father. In many weeks they had only 1 or 2 days of employment. Their weekly earnings in the winter months averaged $3 per week, although in a few weeks of extraordinarily favorable employment conditions they made as much as $12 for 5 or more days of work. The family estimated that their total earnings during the vegetable harvest were only about $100, which, with the $300 from cotton picking, gave this family of 10 an annual income of approximately $400.

Not all families who sought work outside Hidalgo County, however, found the migratory periods profitable. For example, the Lopez family, whose misfortunes during the migratory period have been previously described,[11] lost so much working time because of rain while out of the county that they had to use practically all their earnings to

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[9] For purposes of the discussion on work and earnings, the 42 migratory families who came to Hidalgo County from other places have been included with the 160 families who migrated away from Hidalgo County in the year. Thus figures on employment and earnings relate to the entire group of 202 families who migrated during the year preceding the study.

[10] These figures include the families' total earnings from work in cotton during the year and constitute gross cash earnings before deduction of transportation charges. By and large, they represent earnings from cotton picking, although a few families also worked in cotton during the spring chopping season. Some of the migratory families picked cotton locally before they began to migrate.

All except 13 of the 202 migratory families and 23 of the 140 nonmigratory families reported that they had worked in cotton during the year. The amount of cotton earnings was reported by 169 migrant and 97 nonmigrant families.

[11] See p. 13.

tide them over stretches of unemployment. They returned home with 60 cents left from their earnings for the 21 weeks they were away.

In the instances where agricultural earnings were supplemented by work in a packing shed, cannery, or other nonfarm occupation, greater annual earnings resulted, even though some of this nonfarm work was of brief duration and often badly paid. The median earnings of the 164 families having some nonagricultural employment and reporting earnings were $375, as contrasted with a median of $315 for the 163 families having only farm work.[12] Only 28 percent of the families whose income included wages from nonfarm work had total earnings for the year of $500 or more, but an even smaller proportion, 12 percent, of those working exclusively in agriculture had earned that much.

Annual Income and Relief

The incomes of these households were derived largely from earnings.[13] Only 52 of the 342 families received any supplementary income during the year, from sources such as the sale of possessions, gifts from friends and relatives, cash relief grants, and wages from employment on public-works programs. In a majority (30) of the 52 cases the amount received came to less than $50.[14] The median total cash income among the families with such supplementary income was $395, as compared with $345 among those who were entirely dependent on earnings from private employment.

Including income from all sources, the 342 families in the study had a median total cash income for the year of only $350 [15] from which to provide for their large families, averaging 6.6 persons (table 5). This was considerably less than the minimum annual income of $480 that the Texas Social Welfare Association considered necessary to maintain relief families, averaging only 4.2 persons, at a level of health and decency.[16] The association in its 1940 report on social needs stated: "Any reasonable measure we may use in Texas to compute minimum adequate requirements for relief families, permitting such families to live at a level of health and decency, will reveal the need for an average income of at least $40 per month per family."[17]

In contrast to this annual income standard of $480, more than one-third of the families in the study had less than $300 to live on during the entire year, and almost two-thirds of them reported a total income of less than $400 (table 5). Nearly one-fourth of the families had an income of $500 or more, but even this amount seldom approximated the standard recommended by the Texas Social Wel-

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[12] The average number of workers per family did not differ apparently between the two groups of families.

[13] Figures on income represent only cash income and earnings and exclude income in kind. Information was not available on the cash value of nonmoney income, but this is believed to have been very limited; it included such items as a rent-free dwelling place for some families during part or all of the year, foodstuffs produced for home use, or vegetables that workers were allowed to eat in the fields or take home.

[14] In addition, there were 14 families who reported that they had had lodgers or boarders in the year, commonly relatives, who helped pay for the family's groceries or made small cash payments when they were able. The net income from this source could seldom be determined, but in all probability it either barely equaled or did not appreciably exceed the expense incurred by the family.

[15] This median income is only $10 more than the median yearly earnings of $340 for the 342 families. See p. 15.

[16] Need (published by Texas Social Welfare Association), vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1940), pp. 7, 29. Austin, Tex.

[17] Ibid., p. 29.

fare Association, because most of the families with higher incomes were very large. Over 90 percent of the families with as much as $500 a year to live on had 5 or more members, and 70 percent of them had 7 to 15 members.

TABLE 5.—*Total cash income of families during year preceding interview*

Income	Families interviewed		
	Number	Percent distribution	Cumulative percent
Total	342		
Income reported	327	100.0	
Less than $200	34	10.4	10.4
$200, less than $300	85	26.0	36.4
$300, less than $400	85	26.0	62.4
$400, less than $500	50	15.3	77.7
$500, less than $600	23	7.0	84.7
$600, less than $700	19	5.8	90.5
$700, less than $800	14	4.3	94.8
$800 and over	17	5.2	100.0
Income not reported	15		
Median	$350		

Despite their very low incomes, these people received little aid from public relief or work programs because of the limited extent to which provision had been made in Texas and in Hidalgo County for assistance to needy families. At the time the study was made, the State of Texas provided no State funds for general relief and had not made appropriations for aid to dependent children or aid to the blind under the Social Security Act,[18] although it had provided funds for old-age assistance. Some of the counties, including Hidalgo County, provided local relief funds, but such funds were generally used only for families with no employable members. Direct relief for families of agricultural laborers, such as those included in this study, was, therefore, limited for the most part to the distribution of surplus commodities.

The food-stamp plan, providing for the distribution of $3 worth of free food stamps with the purchase of $6 worth of stamps, had been put into operation in Hidalgo County in November 1940. The requirement of $6 in cash for the purchase of stamps, however, made it impossible for those with very little income to take advantage of the plan.[19] Several of the families reported that they had received surplus commodities before November but had not had sufficient money to purchase stamps since the food-stamp plan had been put into effect.

During the year for which family income was reported, only 45 of the 342 families in the study had had any assistance from an

[18] In 1941, after this study was made, appropriations were made by the Texas Legislature to provide aid to dependent children and aid to the blind, which had been authorized by the Public Welfare Act of 1939, although no appropriations for these purposes had been made. State plans for aid to dependent children and aid to the blind were approved by the Social Security Board in September 1941.

[19] A new plan was to go into effect on March 1, 1941, whereby families who could not purchase stamps might be provided with stamps free.

organized relief program. Twenty families reported that they had had members employed sometime during the year on a Federal works program, as follows:

Type of program:	*Number of families*
WPA only	[1] 10
CCC only	3
NYA only	[1] 5
WPA and NYA	1
CCC and NYA	1
Total	20

[1] Two of these families had also received surplus commodities.

Another 16 families, no members of which had been employed on Federal works programs, reported that they had received some form of public assistance during the year. One family had had a member receiving old-age assistance. Thirteen families received surplus commodities only, while 1 received Farm Security aid and surplus commodities, and 1 of the very few families who had been outside Texas received public relief in another State as well as surplus commodities in Texas. The remaining 9 families received benefits or aid from sources including the crop-control program, unemployment compensation, workmen's compensation, and a mutual-benefit society. One family received assistance from the American Legion, the only case of aid from a nongovernmental organization.

The number of families who received assistance during the week in the winter of 1941 selected for special study [20] was still smaller. Only 8 of the 342 households were assisted through a relief or work program during that week, although the median earnings of all the families for the week were only $6.90.[21] Three families had a member employed on WPA, CCC, or NYA within the week, and 5 received surplus commodities through purchase of food stamps.

The fact that many families were told they could not meet citizenship or local settlement requirements made it particularly difficult for them to obtain relief. One family, in which a sick father and the oldest child, a boy of 11, had earned only $150 working together as field laborers in the year, said that they applied for relief locally and were told that since the father was not an American citizen, they were ineligible for WPA or any other assistance. The five very young children in this family were sometimes without clothes and often without enough to eat. Another family of six members told of being refused relief in several Texas communities to which they had migrated in search of work, on the ground that they had not lived in the community for 6 months. This family's yearly earnings were $462, the major portion of which was earned in the relatively short period during which they picked cotton. In some weeks during the vegetable harvest the family was able to earn as much as $8 a week, but much of the time the five workers, including both parents and three school-age children, aged 15, 13, and 11, earned only about $4. The mother said that if she and her husband could earn "just $2 more a week," they would be able to keep the children in school. As it is, "if the children do not work, the family does not have enough to eat."

[20] See p. 3.
[21] See p. 14.

THE WORK OF THE CHILDREN

The demand of the agricultural industry of the lower Rio Grande Valley for a large labor force to perform seasonal harvest operations, combined with the poverty of the people who do this work, accounted for the early age at which the children in this study became wage earners. In commenting on the inclusion of young children in the crews of field laborers, an official of one of the largest packing sheds in the valley remarked, "Children are taken to the fields even while still in diapers. Those from 10 years of age up work very well. The younger ones, however, are not so efficient."

Since the work of the children and its effect upon their development and well-being was of particular concern in this study, information was obtained for all boys and girls between 6 and 18 years of age in the families interviewed on the extent and character of their work during the year preceding the date of interview and their migratory history for the year. In addition, data on type of employment, hours of work, and earnings in a sample week immediately preceding the date of interview were obtained for each child who did any work during that week.[1]

The Working Children

"When the children are old enough, they have to work," said one mother whose son began to work for hire in the fields when he was but 7 and her daughter when she was 9. The large proportion (69 percent) of the 998 children and young people in the study who worked at some time during the year preceding the date of interview attested to the extent to which boys and girls aided in the support of their families. One-fourth (27 percent) of the children under 10 years of age, most (80 percent) of the children between 10 and 14, and nearly all (95 percent) of the youth between 14 and 18 had had employment within the year (table 6).

TABLE 6.—*Proportion of children who worked during year preceding interview, by age group and sex*

Age group	Both sexes			Boys			Girls		
	Total	Worked during year		Total	Worked during year		Total	Worked during year	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Total	998	685	68.6	538	409	76.0	460	276	60.0
6 and 7 years	161	19	11.8	90	15	16.7	71	4	5.6
8 and 9 years	148	65	43.9	72	39	54.2	76	26	34.2
10 and 11 years	182	134	73.6	98	84	85.7	84	50	59.5
12 and 13 years	171	148	86.5	88	84	95.5	83	64	77.1
14 and 15 years	175	166	94.9	95	93	97.9	80	73	91.3
16 and 17 years	161	153	95.0	95	94	98.9	66	59	89.4

The ages at which the boys and girls became regular contributors to the family income varied. Some instances were reported of 9- and 10-year-olds who were considered indispensable wage earners by their

[1] See a detailed discussion of the method of selecting the sample week, see p. 3.

families. For example, Lorenzo, who was only 9, had never been to school but had worked in the fields during the past year because, his mother explained, "his help is needed." Many children assumed full economic responsibility along with the adult wage earners in the household at 12 or 14 years of age. In fact, it was reported that a number of the 13-, 14-, and 15-year-olds were the chief breadwinners for their families because of the illness or death of the father and the necessity for the mother to devote herself to the younger children.

The boys in the study were employed more frequently than the girls, owing, no doubt, to the fact that girls were often assigned to care for the home and younger children in order to release others in the family for work. Seventy-six percent of the boys between 6 and 18 years of age, as compared with 60 percent of the girls, had been employed during the previous year (table 6). Although the proportion of girls reporting employment was consistently less than that of boys in all age groups, the difference was greater for the girls under 14 years of age than for those who were older. That the younger girls were often assigned to household chores, in order to permit their older sisters with greater earning power to work in the fields, perhaps accounts for this difference.

Migration was another factor that apparently influenced the extent to which the children were employed. Three-fifths (595) of the 998 boys and girls had migrated during the preceding year.[2] Among those who migrated, 78 percent had had employment within the year as compared with 55 percent of the nonmigrants (table 7). In every age group a larger proportion of the migrant than of the nonmigrant boys and girls were employed, but the difference was especially great among the younger children. Proportionately more than twice as many of the migratory children under 10 had had employment as of those who remained at home. Families sometimes left their nonworking children behind when they migrated if provision could be made for their care at home, since travel space was needed for the working members of the family and the hardships encountered during the migratory period were especially difficult for young children.

TABLE 7.—*Migratory and nonmigratory children, by work status during year preceding interview, and age group*

Age group	Migratory children			Nonmigratory children		
	Total	Worked during year		Total	Worked during year	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Total	595	465	78.2	403	220	54.6
6 and 7 years	79	13	16.5	82	6	7.3
8 and 9 years	86	49	57.0	62	16	25.8
10 and 11 years	101	85	84.2	81	49	60.5
12 and 13 years	108	102	94.4	63	46	73.0
14 and 15 years	113	111	98.2	62	55	88.7
16 and 17 years	108	105	97.2	53	48	90.6

[2] A child was considered migratory if he had entered or gone out of Hidalgo County in search of employment during the year preceding the date of interview, either alone or accompanied by others. Of the 595 migratory boys and girls in the study, 76 percent (450) were themselves employed while outside Hidalgo County. The other 24 percent, comprising mainly children under 10 years of age, did not work during the migratory period, but accompanied older workers.

Types of Employment

The large numbers of children seen among the workers in the trucks that traveled the highways of the valley on the way to and from the fields gave evidence of the extensive use of children in the winter-vegetable harvest. The statistical findings of the study confirm the impression that agricultural labor was the main source of employment for the children, as for their families.[3] Of the 685 working boys and girls, 669 reported that their chief occupation, the one at which they spent the most time during the preceding year, was agricultural labor. Fifty-seven had done some nonfarm work, but only 16 had been employed primarily in nonagricultural jobs and all but 4 of these had been employed in some farm work.

Agricultural Work.

Nearly all (91 percent) of the boys and girls who were employed during the year had picked cotton, two-thirds (65 percent) had worked in the vegetable fields, and one-fifth (21 percent) had done other agricultural work, such as picking strawberries or citrus fruit. Table 8 shows the percent of the working boys and girls in different age groups that had worked in cotton, vegetables, and other agricultural products during the year:

TABLE 8.—*Proportion of children employed in cotton, vegetables, and other farm work during year preceding interview*

Age group	Number of children working	Percent of children who worked in—		
		Cotton	Vegetables	Other farm work
6 to 17 years	685	90.7	65.0	20.7
6 to 9 years	84	90.5	33.3	19.0
10 to 13 years	282	90.8	55.3	12.8
14 and 15 years	166	92.8	80.1	26.5
16 and 17 years	153	88.2	83.0	30.0

The extent to which children of all ages participated in cotton picking is shown by the high proportion, approximately 90 percent, of the working boys and girls in each age group that had been employed in cotton. Many of the younger children did no other kind of work, though practically all the boys and girls who were 14 years of age or over had other employment.

Most of the children's work in the cotton fields was cotton picking, although some children helped in preharvest operations and in clearing the fields of stalks after the end of the harvest.[4] Even very young children were useful during the cotton-picking season for the simple task of pulling cotton from the bolls and tossing it into sacks fastened to the workers' shoulders. In spite of the relative ease with which a small child can pick cotton, this work, when performed for long hours under a hot sun, is monotonous and fatiguing, especially as

[3] The types of work done by the families are discussed on p. 3.

[4] In the interest of control of the pink boll worm and the boll weevil, there is a regulation in the area, which is stringently enforced, that the cotton fields must be cleared by a certain date in the fall. To a certain extent the Government subsidizes this work.

the sacks become heavy with the picked cotton. Sometimes children as young as 10 and 11 years of age picked 50 pounds of cotton in a day; those 3 or 4 years older reported picking from 150 to 200 pounds per day.[5]

The children's employment in the vegetable fields represented mainly harvest operations, although it also included some work in transplanting and cultivating. Work in the vegetable fields is carried on largely during the school term; but, as the figures on types of agricultural work show, one-third of the working children under 10, more than half of those between 10 and 14, and four-fifths of those 14 years of age and over had worked in vegetables.

While nearly all kinds of vegetables available in the northern and eastern winter markets are grown in Hidalgo County, the boys and girls in this study were employed most frequently in the harvest crews gathering carrots, beets, radishes, spinach, and broccoli. The younger children worked mostly in the harvesting of root vegetables, which requires comparatively little skill or strength. In preparation for the work of the harvest crew, the rows of vegetables are loosened by a mechanical operation. The field laborers need only pick the vegetables from the ground, shake them free of dirt, and tie them into bunches containing the specified number of vegetables. Then the bunches are usually counted and put into bushel baskets or crates. Children sometimes did all these operations, although often they were divided among the different members of the family.

In harvesting spinach, broccoli, cabbages, and parsley, the worker uses a small, sharp knife to cut the vegetable from the root or stalk. None of the children under 10 years of age in the study reported harvesting these vegetables, owing undoubtedly to the need for skill in using the knife, the strength required, and the danger that the child might cut himself. A number of the children between 10 and 14, however, as well as some of the older boys and girls, harvested spinach, broccoli, cabbages, and parsley.

In addition to these winter vegetables, Hidalgo County raises two tomato crops, which ripen in the late fall and the spring, and sweet corn, which matures in early summer. Children under 14 were seldom used to gather these crops. As one labor contractor explained with regard to tomato picking, "Young children are likely to be careless and damage the ripening fruit and plants." Children under 14 reported that they did not help in harvesting corn because they were "neither tall enough nor strong enough to cut the corn from the stalks."

Agricultural employment other than cotton picking and harvesting vegetables played a minor part in the work during the preceding year of the boys and girls in this study. One-fifth (142) of these children and young people were employed in other types of agricultural work, mainly picking strawberries and citrus fruit, but most of them in addition harvested cotton or vegetables or both.

The cultivation of strawberries had not been extensively developed in the valley at the time of this study, but in one area a number of children, including several under 10, had picked strawberries. Strawberry picking was done largely by mothers and their young children.

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[5] Since these families reported receiving from 40 cents to $1 per hundred pounds for picking cotton, it can be seen that even young children added a fair amount to the family income during the cotton-picking season.

Employment in the citrus groves was comparatively infrequent among the younger children, although some of the young people 14 years of age or older worked in harvesting the fruit. This was owing to the attitude in the community that boys under 16 were too young to work in the groves because of the skill and strength required for handling heavy fruit.

Nonagricultural Work.

The 57 children and young people who reported nonfarm employment had often worked in industries allied to agriculture. Eighteen reported employment in packing sheds, of whom 7 were under 16 and 2 under 14 years of age. Those under 14 were employed in apparent violation of the minimum-age provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Twelve of the boys and girls had worked in canneries and 3 of these were under 16, despite the 16-year minimum age for this type of work set by the act. There were in addition 2 children 7 and 10 years of age employed in pecan shelling, for which the minimum age is also 16 years.[6] The other 25 boys and girls were in a wide variety of occupations, including domestic service, dishwashing, clerking and janitor service in retail stores, construction work, and employment in theaters. The 4 who had had no farm employment during the year were girls 12 to 17 years of age, of whom 3 worked as domestic servants and 1 did laundry work at home.

Weeks of Employment

The amount of employment that the boys and girls had during the preceding year varied between age groups and also with the need of the family. Most of the older boys and girls, 14 years and over, who had quit school and were considered regular members of the family working force had had employment in a considerable part of the year. The extent to which the younger children were employed often depended on whether the family had enough to provide for current needs. Mrs. Zarate, for example, said, "My children go to school regularly if the family income is adequate for living expenses, but when we do not have enough, the children work."

Nearly half the working children under 14 reported employment in 20 or more weeks (table 9). A still larger proportion, more than three-fourths, of the boys and girls of 14 and 15 years and almost nine-tenths of those aged 16 and 17 years worked in at least 20 weeks. Since these figures represent calendar weeks in which the children did any work, each week of employment reported may include from 1 to 7 days of work.

The number of weeks of employment reported by the youth 16 and 17 years of age, who were generally considered as adults by their families, may be interpreted as reflecting the total employment opportunities available to field workers in the area.

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[6] The packing sheds, canneries, and pecan-shelling establishments in which these children were employed in all likelihood produced goods for shipment in interstate commerce and were, therefore, in all probability, covered by the child-labor provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. For employment in canneries and in pecan shelling, which are classified as processing establishments, the minimum age is 16 years. Children of 14 and 15 may, however, be employed outside school hours in nonmanufacturing occupations, such as work in packing sheds, under conditions specified by the Chief of the Children's Bureau.

TABLE 9.—*Number of weeks in which children worked during year preceding interview, by age group*

Age group	Total reporting [1]	Children who worked—							
		Less than 12 weeks		12 weeks and less than 20		20 weeks and less than 40		40 weeks and over	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	649	108	16.6	133	20.5	223	34.4	185	28.5
6 to 9 years	79	22	27.8	31	39.3	23	29.1	3	3.8
10 to 13 years	260	65	25.0	69	26.5	90	34.6	36	13.9
14 to 15 years	161	15	9.3	21	13.1	73	45.3	52	32.3
16 and 17 years	149	6	4.0	12	8.1	37	24.8	94	63.1

[1] Excludes 36 boys and girls who worked during preceding year but did not report number of weeks worked.

Employment in 40 or more weeks, covering more than three-fourths of the year, was reported by nearly two-thirds of the boys and girls of this age, compared with one-third of those aged 14 and 15. There were also 39 children under 14, out of the total of 339 reporting, who had this much employment.

Nine-year-old Valentino was one of the children under 14 years of age in the study who worked in 40 or more weeks. Valentino had been going to the fields since he was 7 years old, with his father, mother, and older brother. He had never attended school, because, as his father said, "We are so poor, and we move around so much." During the previous year Valentino worked 50 weeks. He picked cotton in 21 weeks in four different Texas counties to which the family migrated. The other 29 weeks he worked in vegetables in Hidalgo County. His father said, "Valentino is still learning to work."

This story reflects the importance of the migratory period as a source of employment. Only 10 percent of the migrants who were 6 to 17 years of age also worked in less than 12 weeks, compared to 32 percent of the nonmigratory group. Two-thirds (68 percent) of the migrant children and young people as compared to only half (52 percent) of the nonmigrants worked in 20 or more weeks.

Cotton picking often provided work in a considerable part of the year. The cotton-harvesting season in Hidalgo County and neighboring counties in the lower Rio Grande Valley afforded 7 or 8 weeks of work during the peak of the season in July and August, and for 2 or 3 weeks of less profitable picking in September. For children who migrated, an additional 12 weeks of work in the cotton fields of northern Texas were sometimes possible from September to early December. Two-thirds (65 percent) of the children and young people between 6 and 18 years who were employed in cotton worked in 12 or more weeks, and one-fifth (19 percent) picked cotton in 20 or more weeks.

Agricultural work other than cotton picking, however, provided more weeks of employment than work in cotton. Of the boys and girls 6 to 17 years of age who had employment in vegetables or other agricultural labor, nearly 50 percent were employed at such work in 20 or more weeks during the year, more than twice as large a proportion as worked in cotton for this length of time.

Only nonfarm work of the children and young people was insufficient in relation not only to the number employed but also in the amount of work offered.[7] Fourteen of the 46 boys and girls of 6 to 17 years reporting the duration of their nonfarm jobs had such employment in 20 or more weeks.

Working Conditions and Earnings in the Winter Harvest

The work of the children during the peak of the vegetable-harvesting season was characterized by great irregularity in the number of working days per week, by long hours spent away from home on the days when work was available, and by low rates of pay. This is shown by detailed information on the children's employment during a sample week immediately preceding the date of interview.[8]

The boys and girls who worked during the week included 20 children under 10 years of age and 112 who were 10 to 13, nearly one-third of the total number of children of that age in the study, despite the fact that this workweek came in the middle of the school year. Over three-fourths (263) of the young people 14 years of age and over were employed within the week.

Work in the vegetable fields was the principal job of these boys and girls during the sample week, although some young workers reported employment in the citrus groves, strawberry fields, and other agricultural work and, occasionally, in nonfarm jobs. The findings of this study for the sample workweek consequently represent chiefly the conditions of work among children who harvest winter vegetables.

Number of Working Days.

The variation in the amount of field work available from day to day during the winter harvest was reflected in the irregularity of children's employment during the sample week. Nearly half (46 percent) of the boys and girls who had been employed in the sample week worked 3 or 4 days, while one-fourth (24 percent) worked only 1 or 2 days and nearly one-third (30 percent) 5 or more days during the week. Seven boys and girls, including one under 14 years of age, worked all 7 days of the week (table 10).

TABLE 10.—*Number of days on which children worked during sample week*

Number of working days	Number of children			
	Total	6 to 14 years	14 and 15 years	16 and 17 years
Total reporting	379	125	128	126
1 or 2 days	90	40	32	18
3 or 4 days	173	50	60	63
5 or 6 days	109	34	34	41
7 days	7	1	2	4

The young people 14 years of age and over usually worked whenever employment was available. This was true also of some of the younger

[7] See pp. 11–12, 22.
[8] See p. 3.

children who were not in school because they were needed to help earn the family living. In some families, however, the younger children worked only when the economic pressure at home was greatest. For instance, Juan, who was 11 years of age, reported that he had remained away from school to work in the fields on 1 day in the preceding week, because "the family's grocery bill was so large that my earnings were needed to pay it up even partly."

Hours of Work.

The length of the children's workday was determined not only by the actual hours of labor in the fields but also by the time spent in waiting and in transportation. Often many hours were taken up in traveling to and from the fields or from one field to another, in waiting to be taken home after the completion of the day's work, and sometimes in waiting at the packing shed in the morning for an assignment. As a result, although the children often were employed for only a few hours in the day, their total workdays were usually long. Fifty-seven per cent of the boys and girls for whom information was available averaged 10 hours or more away from home for each day they were employed during the sample week. The hours reported as spent away from home on workdays varied from as little as 2 to as many as 16. And the total weekly hours reported, including transportation and waiting time, ranged from 3 to more than 90.

These hours represent the families' estimates of the length of the workday and therefore should be regarded only as approximations, since many families had no clocks or watches and the hours of the day had little importance in the pattern of their living. Nevertheless, these estimates have value, in that they suggest the excessively long hours that the children devoted to their jobs on the days when they went to work.

The number of hours that the children spent in actual work in the fields, as well as the length of their working days and the conditions surrounding their employment, are illustrated by the following stories, which are typical of the experiences of many children in the study.

The three Gonzalez boys, aged 7, 9, and 12 years, regularly accompanied their father to work in the vegetable fields in the winter, although the younger boys had never been to school and the older boy had attended but 1 month in each of 2 years. During the sample workweek, the three boys went with their father to gather carrots on 5 days, leaving home about 8 o'clock in the morning and returning about 6 o'clock in the evening. It was reported that of the 10 hours spent away from home each day they actually worked about 7 hours. The four workers gathered from 10 to 13 bushel baskets of carrots each day and earned altogether $6 during the week for their estimated 140 hours of work.

In the Martinez family, the three older children, aged 10, 15, and 16, all worked in the winter-vegetable harvest with their father whenever work was available. This family was able to obtain work on only 2 days of the sample week. They reported that their labor contractor called for them about 8 o'clock each morning and that they returned home about 8 o'clock in the evening, but that they worked only about 5½ hours out of the 12-hour day. The rest of the time was spent in waiting for the trucker to transact his business at the packing shed and in transportation to and from the fields. They were paid at the rate of 10 cents per bushel basket of carrots harvested, and their combined earnings for the 2 days of work was $5.

The tempo at which the field crews worked in gathering the crops was usually a matter of individual choice. Some of the families, how-

ever, complained that the large number of workers taken to the fields reduced the possible earnings for the family. Consequently, since each family was eager to earn as much as possible during the time the work was available, all members, including the children, usually worked as rapidly as they could.

The amount of time taken from work to eat was generally a matter of the worker's choice also. On the days when they could spare the time, some workers spent as much as an hour in eating lunch. Others reported that they took a lunch to the fields but never took time off to eat it. Frequently they ate as they worked.

Weekly Earnings.

Since the families were frequently employed as groups, the earnings of many of the children during the sample week were included in the combined earnings of the family and were paid to the chief worker, instead of to the child himself. Sometimes, however, children worked independently and received their own wages. This was especially true of the boys and girls over 16 years of age. Fifty-six percent of the employed young people aged 16 and 17 were the recipients of their own pay for the sample week, compared with 34 percent of those 12 to 15 and only 16 percent of those under 12 years of age.[9] A few of the boys and girls who worked and were paid independently had packing-shed or other nonfarm jobs, but most of them worked in the vegetable fields.

The children's individual earnings in the sample week were reported for 135 boys and girls of 14 to 17 and for 39 of those 10 to 13 years, but for only 3 children under 10 year of age.[10] The figures on weekly earnings given in table 11 therefore represent mainly the amounts earned by the more mature boys and girls, whose earning power tended to be greater than that of the younger children.

TABLE 11.—*Weekly cash earnings of children*

Weekly earnings	Number of children			
	6 to 17 years	6 to 14 years	14 and 15 years	16 and 17 years
Total reporting	177	42	55	80
Less than $1	45	20	13	12
$1, less than $2	29	7	13	9
$2, less than $3	50	7	14	29
$3 and over	53	8	15	30

Earnings of less than $2 for the week were reported by nearly two-thirds of the children under 14, by nearly half of those aged 14 and 15, and by one-fourth even of the boys and girls aged 16 and 17 years.

[9] Practically all the children who received their own pay worked independently during the week. A few instances were reported, however, in which a contractor paid a small child separately, though he was working with his family, in order to please him and give him a feeling of accomplishment. A few of the older boys and girls were the chief wage earners for their families and as such received not only their own earnings but those of the younger children.

[10] The amount of the children's earnings was reported for almost all those who worked independently and for some who worked as members of a family group but whose individual earnings could be estimated from the quantities of vegetables harvested and the known piece rates.

Some instances of the low wages the children and young people received have been cited in the discussion of their hours of work. The work of two brothers in the Salazar family, who were 12 and 14 years of age, further illustrates the low earnings of children of this age in a full workweek. Usually these boys worked together, but in the sample week they were employed by different contractors. The older boy worked fewer hours and also earned less money than his younger brother. Each had 5 days of work. Domingo, the older of the two, gathered and bunched carrots. He left home each morning at 7:30 o'clock and returned between 3 and 6 o'clock in the evening. Of this time away from home he actually worked in the fields from 3 to 5 hours each day and earned $2.20 during the week, or little more than 10 cents an hour. Ramon, the younger brother, left home with his contractor at 7 o'clock on each of 5 workdays and did not return home until 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. He gathered carrots and earned $3 during the workweek.

A study of the employment of the young workers who reported higher wages reveals that in some instances these children and young people had work in a packing shed in addition to their field work. For example, two boys of 14 and 16, who each earned $5 in the sample workweek, not only cut broccoli in the fields in the morning but also tied the broccoli in bunches in the afternoon and evening. This latter work was done on the packing-house grounds for a contractor who had charge of the outside work for the packing shed. During the sample week they were employed only until 6:30 or 7:30 o'clock, but they reported that at times they worked until 11 o'clock in the evening. Other children in the study did other types of work for the packing sheds. An instance was reported of a 16-year-old girl who labeled bunches of broccoli, sometimes until 4 o'clock in the morning. She worked 13 hours a day on 4 days in the sample workweek and earned $5.75 for the week, averaging about 11 cents an hour.

When the long hours of work in the fields are considered, together with the tedious hours spent traveling in trucks on the highways and the hours of waiting at the packing shed without supper in the evening, the few dollars that the children earned per week seem insignificant. Often, however, the children's earnings constituted a sizeable proportion of the weekly income of the family. Sometimes their wages of $1 or $2 per week covered the rent for the family's shelter for a month, a considerable proportion of the cost of the family's food, or necessary clothing. Small as the earnings of the children were, it is obvious why their families considered their contribution to the family income essential, especially when it is recalled that approximately three-fourths of the children and young people included in this study came from households with an annual income below the minimum of $480 estimated by the Texas Social Welfare Association as necessary to provide a decent and healthful standard of living.

SCHOOLING OF THE CHILDREN

In the lower Rio Grande Valley children in busses on their way to school often passed other children in trucks on their way to the fields. Many children worked and grew up in the valley with little or no education, because they were poor, because it was customary to use children for field labor, and because lack of enforcement of the State compulsory-school-attendance law permitted the work of children during schooltime.

At the outset of the present study, it was recognized that a survey concerned with the work and welfare of the children in families of field laborers must of necessity include information on the children's education and on the extent to which work activities and migration interfered with school opportunities. Educational histories were obtained by the Children's Bureau for each of the 998 boys and girls between 6 and 18 years in the families interviewed. These histories covered the date when the child last attended school, the grade in which he was last enrolled, the number of different years in which he enrolled, and the like. Data on schooling gathered through family interviews were supplemented wherever possible by individual pupil records available from the files of local schools. In addition, the Office of Education, in a parallel survey, gathered data that indicated the difficult problems of school organization and administration created when large numbers of children enroll late and attend irregularly. This was done through questionnaires and visits to the schools serving the areas included in the Children's Bureau survey.

The School Problem

Enforcement of school attendance was difficult in Hidalgo County owing to a combination of circumstances. Exemptions are permitted under the State compulsory-school-attendance law, attendance officers were lacking, and school facilities were inadequate to accommodate all children in the district. Other obstacles confronting local school officials were the poverty of many families, who considered the help of their children essential in earning a living; the lack of concern for the education of Spanish-speaking children that prevailed in the community; and the demand for child labor in the winter-vegetable harvest.

Texas School-Attendance Law.

The Texas school law provides that local school authorities shall admit to school any person who is at least 6 and not over 21 years of age at the beginning of the school year and who lives in the local school district at the time of applying for admission. The age of compulsory school attendance in the State is, however, 7 to 15 years. Children are required to attend school at least 120 days each year but they may be temporarily excused for illness, storms, or unusual causes acceptable to the school officials. They may also be exempted if they have a mental or physical handicap that renders attendance inadvisable; if they live more than 2½ miles from the nearest public school for children of the same race and color, with no transportation provided; or if they come within the poverty clause. According to this clause, boys and girls who are at least 12 years of age and have completed the seventh grade

may be excused upon presentation of proper evidence to the county superintendent of schools if their services are needed for support of a parent or guardian.

Enforcement of School Attendance.

Little if any attempt was made by the school districts studied to account for all the children listed in the annual school census to determine why many of them were not in school, to compel enrollment of all those of compulsory-attendance age, or to require regular attendance of the total group enrolled. The procedure for obtaining permission to remain away from school, as set forth in the laws, was generally dispensed with, regardless of the age of the child or the grade he had completed. In consequence, large numbers of school-age children did not enroll, and many of those who were enrolled attended irregularly. A school principal stated, for example, that of the 2,600 children between 6 and 18 years of age in the school census for his district only about 1,600 had enrolled during the current school year.

No attendance officer was available in any of the districts serving the children in this study to aid in enforcing enrollment and attendance. The Texas State law permits the appointment of an attendance official in districts having a scholastic population of 2,000 or more. Only one district in the study was as large as this, however, and it had no such officer. Contact between the home and the school was left wholly to the teacher and principal.

The reason most frequently given by school authorities for not enforcing the compulsory-attendance laws was that the poverty of the families made it necessary for the children to work. One school official was reported to have raised the query, "If the children must go to school, who is going to feed them?" In addition, the attitude that school attendance should not be allowed to interfere with the supply of cheap farm labor was widespread in the community. Loopholes in the compulsory-school-attendance law were also an important factor in the situation. A school principal stated that he knew of 50 cases in Texas in which an attempt had been made to prosecute parents for not keeping their children in school and not a single conviction had been obtained because the school law had so many exemptions that the cases did not stand up in court.

Some instances were reported, furthermore, of schools that not only failed to enforce attendance but refused admission to some children of legal school age, especially those applying for admission late in the term, because of the overcrowded conditions in the schools and the special difficulty of providing for children who enroll late. According to the principal, one school had a ruling that children might enter after the first 3 months of the school term only if they presented a transfer certificate establishing school attendance elsewhere during these early months. Thus, some of the children who migrated from Hidalgo County were discouraged from enrollment, since they seldom if ever went to school while away from home. It was reported that children of 6 and 7 years had at times been refused admission at the beginning of the school year on the ground that they were "too young," even though their birth dates placed them within the legal school age and sometimes within the age of compulsory attendance.

School Finance and Attendance.

An important consideration in all problems relating to the enforcement of school attendance in Texas, as well as to many other educational situations in the State, is the fact that apportionments to the local schools from the State school fund are made upon the basis of the number of children 6 to 17 years of age found in a given school district when the school census is taken during the month of March each year. The school districts are paid a per capita apportionment for each child of 6 to 17 years in the district, whether they actually enroll and attend regularly or not. The amount of the per capita State aid for the 1939–40 school year was $22.

In localities such as Hidalgo County where many children are out of school, the State money apportioned for all the boys and girls on the census rolls is used for the education of only those who attend. In the school district previously referred to, where the scholastic population enumerated was about 2,600 and the total State apportionment therefore approximately $57,200, the per capita aid received was divided among the 1,600 children enrolled and amounted to approximately $36 per child. This made possible a much smaller school appropriation by the local community than would have been necessary to provide the same level of education for all children in the district. Thus the nonenforcement of the compulsory-attendance law not only reduced the local tax levies but made available to some of the children, especially those in comparatively fortunate economic circumstances, a better education than would have been possible if all the children had attended.

School Organization.

The towns of the Rio Grande Valley as a rule had two public elementary schools, one located in the English-speaking community, and one on the "other side of the tracks," where the majority of the families of Spanish-speaking agricultural workers lived. A parochial school was also available in some towns for Spanish-speaking children. The public schools for the Spanish-speaking children were usually referred to as the Latin-American schools and therefore will be so designated throughout this study. These schools generally provided instruction through only the first four or five grades. If the children wished to continue their education beyond the grades offered in the school in their home locality, it was necessary for them to go to the "other" school. This transfer usually demanded so great an adjustment that there was a marked falling off in enrollment in the grade requiring the move.

The facilities in the Latin-American schools often were less adequate than in the schools serving the English-speaking community. While some school buildings in the Mexican sections were modern and comparatively well maintained, others were dilapidated and ill kept. The space in many of the schoolrooms was strained far beyond capacity. Some elementary teachers had as many as 50 or 60 children in rooms intended for half that number. Even basic equipment such as textbooks was lacking for some children, although textbooks were provided from public funds.

Thus hampered by overcrowded classes and limited equipment, school officials had to meet the problems of children with a language

handicap, who entered late in the school year and attended irregularly. Various methods were used to meet these special educational needs. One school reported organizing new sections every 6 weeks to accommodate children enrolling late. Most of the schools had ungraded rooms in which children who had attended school previously but who entered late were placed until their proper grade was ascertained. Special ungraded rooms in which home economics was emphasized for the girls and shop work for the boys were sometimes provided for retarded children. One school reported that it had no opportunity room as such but that each grade was divided into sections in which children who were fast, slow, or irregular in their school work were grouped together.

The school generally had a beginners' class, which was intended to serve as a prefirst grade or period of orientation for children with a language handicap, though in some schools the curriculum and methods in this class were similar to those used in the first grade. All children, except a very few who already knew some English, began in the beginners' class. In spite of this help, however, the language handicap usually remained a problem for the first 4 or 5 years of school, because the children generally spoke only Spanish at home and therefore forgot during periods of nonattendance much of the English previously learned. This was particularly true of the large numbers of children who entered school late and withdrew before the close of the school year.

The Office of Education found an enormous piling up of children in the beginners' and first grades in the Latin-American schools. Table 12 gives the number of children enrolled in these and other grades during the 1940–41 school year in several schools (designated as A, B, C, D, and E) attended by children in the families interviewed.

TABLE 12.—*Number of children enrolled in five Hidalgo County schools*

School grade	Number of children enrolled in schools				
	A	B	C	D	E
Total	791	1,117	647	398	208
First [1]	358	487	354	156	114
Second	121	196	102	54	19
Third	123	225	75	79	20
Fourth	102	209	67	39	22
Fifth or higher	87	[2]	49	70	33

[1] The figures on enrollment in this table were obtained from the school records by the Office of Education. Children in the beginners' grades were grouped with the first grade by the Office of Education because of the similarity in the curriculum and methods used in these grades by many teachers.
[2] There was no fifth grade in this school.

The disproportionately large number of children concentrated in the first and prefirst grades reflected the general practice of holding children for several years in these introductory classes, largely because of irregular attendance and inability to speak and understand English. Some children 12 years of age or older and many who had been in school 3, 4, or even 5 years were found in these grades in each of the schools studied. Retardation to the extent found no doubt caused many children to become discouraged and was an important factor

in their decision to quit school for work before completing the early grades of their elementary education.

School Enrollment and Attendance of the Children

Many of the children in the families interviewed were among the large group in the community who were not enrolled in school or who attended during only part of the school year. The opportunity for normal school attendance was often referred to by the families as a luxury beyond the reach of their children. "Eating is more important than schooling," said one father, who in these words expressed the choice that some parents made when they sent their children to work in the fields rather than to school.

Enrollment Status.

Although this study was made at a season when the migrants had returned home and when the number of children enrolled in the schools of the area was at the peak for the school year, only 488 children, or 58 percent, of the 837 who were 6 to 15 years of age had enrolled in any school either public or parochial up to the time of interview (table 13).[1] Of the 161 youth of 16 and 17 years, only 9 were in school. Many boys and girls who were not enrolled had attended at some time previous to the 1940–41 school year, but 18 percent of the children aged 6 to 15 years and 9 percent of those aged 16 and 17 had never been to any school.

TABLE 13.—*School enrollment of children in 1940–41 and previous school years, by age group*

Age group	Total children	Enrolled in 1940–41 school year		Enrolled prior to 1940–41 school year only		Never enrolled	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	998	497	49.8	338	33.9	163	16.3
6 to 15 years	837	488	58.3	201	24.0	148	17.7
6 years	80	14	17.5	----------	----------	66	82.5
7 years	81	44	54.3	3	3.7	34	42.0
8 years	83	64	77.1	4	4.8	15	18.1
9 years	65	56	86.2	4	6.1	5	7.7
10 years	95	79	83.1	9	9.5	7	7.4
11 years	87	77	88.5	8	9.2	2	2.3
12 years	86	64	74.4	20	23.3	2	2.3
13 years	85	46	54.1	33	38.8	6	7.1
14 years	96	30	31.3	60	62.5	6	6.2
15 years	79	14	17.7	60	76.0	5	6.3
16 and 17 years	161	9	5.6	137	85.1	15	9.3
16 years	88	7	7.9	73	83.0	8	9.1
17 years	73	2	2.7	64	87.7	7	9.6

The lack of enforcement of the compulsory-school-attendance law in the areas studied is illustrated by the large proportion (283 or 37 percent) of the 757 children between 7 and 16, the group of compulsory-school-attendance age, who were not enrolled. Eight of these chil-

[1] Includes all children reported enrolled during the 1940–41 school year up to the date of interview, either in Hidalgo County or elsewhere.

dren were reported to be out of school because of an illness or a mental or physical handicap, which are among the grounds for exemption listed in the law.[2] For the others, no reason was given that would seem to be legal justification for their failure to enroll. Most of them were reported out of school because they had to work; some lacked clothing; others were needed at home.[3] However, since none of them had completed the seventh grade and many were under 12, they did not satisfy the legislative requirements for exemption of children whose aid is needed for the support of their families.

The ages of the enrolled children reflected the brevity of the school experience of most children of field workers in the valley. Seldom were children enrolled before they were 7 or 8 and usually by the time they were 14 they had withdrawn. Less than one-fifth of the children who were 6 years of age at the date of interview were in school[4] (table 14). Among those who were 7 years old, somewhat more than half were enrolled. Apparently children enrolled in school most frequently between the ages of 8 and 13, since more than three-fourths of this age group were in school. There was, however, a marked reduction at 13 years of age in the proportion attending school. Slightly more than half (54 percent) of the 13-year-olds were still in attendance. Above that age enrollment was rare. Most (75 percent) of the boys and girls of 14 and 15, and nearly all (94 percent) of those who were 16 and 17 were not in school, since young people of these ages were generally considered grown and were expected to assume the economic and household responsibilities of adults.

Attendance of the Enrolled Children.

A study of the school-attendance records of the enrolled children shows that their attendance often fell far short of the minimum of 120 days required by law. Their many days of absence indicate how little was done by the schools of the area to require regular attendance of agricultural laborers' children.

Late enrollment in the fall, owing to migration and work, irregular attendance during the school term, largely because of work, and to a certain extent withdrawal early in the school year, combined to reduce the children's schooling. Of the 460 under 16 years of age for whom information on the date of enrolling in the 1940-41 school year was available from school records, only 37 percent entered before September 15.[5] Twenty-three percent enrolled between September 15 and November 15, and the remaining 40 percent began after November 15. Withdrawals from school began shortly after the opening of school in the fall and continued at an increasing rate throughout the school year. Twelve percent of the children reporting withdrew before March and another 16 percent withdrew during March and April, leaving less than three-fourths (72 percent) still enrolled in May.

Attendance throughout most of the school year was exceptional. Only 62 (14 percent) of the 454 children under 16 years of age for whom complete attendance records were available attended as much

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[2] See p. 30.

[3] The reasons for the children's nonenrollment are analyzed in greater detail on pp. 39–42.

[4] Forty of the 80 children 6 years of age at the date of interview had not reached their sixth birthday at the beginning of the 1940–41 school year and were therefore outside the age group that the school authorities are required by law to admit to school. See p. 30.

[5] The schools of the areas studied opened between September 2 and 9.

as 32 weeks, missing not more than 3 weeks of school. Only 177 (39 percent) attended as much as 120 days and thus met the minimum attendance requirement of the compulsory-school-attendance law. Ninety-seven (21 percent) of the boys and girls attended only 12 weeks or less, the equivalent of about one-third or less of the school year.[6]

Additional evidence of the irregularity of the children's school experience is given in their attendance record during the sample workweek.[7] Of the 488 children under 16 who were enrolled in the 1940–41 school year, 155, or nearly one-third, were absent one or more days during this week, and about one-fifth were absent all 5 days of the school week, owing usually to work in the vegetable harvest. The limited attendance in this week illustrates the interruptions in the children's schooling throughout the winter harvest season and in part accounts for the meager total attendance reported for the year.

Migration and Work Interfere With School.

Many children missed the opening months of the school year because of migration, and if they enrolled in school at all on arrival in Hidalgo County, they were frequently absent for work. The school-attendance record for the 1940–41 school year of Domingo Garza, who was 11 years old and only in the second grade after having been enrolled in 5 different school years, illustrates the extent to which migration and work cut down the number of days left many young migrants for school. The Garza family returned from cotton picking in west Texas late in November. Domingo enrolled on November 26, thus missing about one-third of the total school year. In addition, he lost another month and a half in the spring because he withdrew on April 15. He also missed many days during the time he was enrolled. For example, in the representative workweek he attended only 1 day. On 2 school days he worked and on the other 2 he looked for work but was unsuccessful. In all, he was in school but 52 days of that school year. Apparently, the brevity of this school session for him was but a repetition of all his years in school. The school record of his attendance in the previous 4 years was 42 days, 76 days, 99 days, and 90 days, respectively.

The necessity of entering late in the school year appears to have deterred many migratory children from enrolling. Of the migrants 6 to 15 years of age, 54 percent were enrolled in the 1940–41 school year as compared with 64 percent of the nonmigratory group. The proportion of children enrolled was smaller among the migratory than among the nonmigratory boys and girls in all age groups, with the exception of those 6 and 7 years old (table 14).

Children migrating from Hidalgo County for work in northern and western Texas rarely attended school during the migratory period. Only 2 of the 368 children who migrated out of the county in the summer and fall of 1940 reported that they had entered school in the localities where their families worked while away. Of the 119 children who had lived elsewhere earlier in the year but came to Hidalgo County

[6] These statistics represent aggregate days of attendance during the year, not consecutive school weeks. They were derived by dividing by 5 the figures on total days of attendance obtained for each child from the Hidalgo County school records.

[7] This is the same workweek previously referred to. See p. 3. The information on attendance during this sample week was obtained from the children's families and was not verified from the school records.

for the 1940–41 winter harvest season, a number had been enrolled in school that autumn before coming to the county. For the most part, however, the dates when the migratory children entered the Hidalgo County schools represented their first enrollment for the year and illustrated the extent to which they were handicapped in comparison with nonmigratory children. According to the school records, only 7 percent of the migrants under 16 years of age who were enrolled in the 1940–41 school year entered before September 15 compared with 69 percent of the nonmigrants. Conversely, 69 percent of the migratory children enrolled after November 15, while only 8 percent of the nonmigratory group entered school so late. Withdrawal early in the school year further reduced the school attendance of the migrants. Thirty-two percent of the migratory children who were enrolled in school left before May 1, compared with 23 percent of those who were in Hidalgo County throughout the year.

TABLE 14.—*Proportion of migratory and nonmigratory children enrolled in 1940–41 school year, by age group*

Age group	Migratory children			Nonmigratory children		
	Total	Enrolled in school		Total	Enrolled in school	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Total	595	268	45.0	403	229	56.8
6 to 15 years	487	263	54.0	350	225	64.3
6 and 7 years	79	29	36.7	82	29	35.4
8 and 9 years	86	65	75.6	62	55	88.7
10 and 11 years	101	83	82.2	81	73	90.1
12 and 13 years	108	63	58.3	63	47	74.6
14 and 15 years	113	23	20.3	62	21	33.9
16 and 17 years	108	5	4.6	53	4	7.5

Consequently, a great difference was found in the total number of weeks the migratory and nonmigratory children attended school during the 1940–41 school year. Only 16 percent of the migrant children who were enrolled attended more than 24 weeks or 120 days out of the 35 weeks in the school year and had thus met the minimum attendance requirement of the compulsory-school-attendance law (table 15). On the other hand, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the children who stayed in Hidalgo County attended school more than 24 weeks.

The interference of migration with school attendance placed the migratory children under a great handicap in their efforts to progress in school. Even when these children, and the smaller group of nonmigratory children enrolling late, were assigned to special classes organized to meet their needs, it was practically impossible for them to make normal educational progress within the limited time they were in attendance. The situation of the many boys and girls entering late for whom no special provision was made by the schools was still worse. Assigned to classes that included also children who enrolled at the opening of school, with a teacher too overburdened to give them much individual attention, many of these children acquired little of positive value from their school experience and were likely to find it frustrating and humiliating.

TABLE 15.—*Number of weeks of school attendance during the 1940-41 school year for enrolled children 6 to 15 years of age, by migratory status* [1]

Number of weeks of school attendance	Children 6 to 15 years of age enrolled in 1940-41 school year					
	Total		Migratory		Nonmigratory	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	473		247		226	
Number of weeks reported	454	100.0	232	100.0	222	100.0
8 weeks or less	42	9.3	26	11.2	16	7.2
Over 8 weeks to 16	96	21.1	62	26.7	34	15.3
Over 16 weeks to 24	139	30.6	107	46.1	32	14.4
Over 24 weeks to 32	115	25.3	36	15.5	79	35.6
Over 32 weeks to 35	62	13.7	1	.5	61	27.5
Number of weeks not reported	19		15		4	

[1] Boys and girls of 16 and 17 years are not included in the table. There were only 9 young people of this age in the study who were enrolled in the 1940–41 school year.

Since a great part of the employment opportunities for children came during the cotton-picking season (which for the migrant children did not end until December) and the vegetable harvest from December to the close of the school year, their work was seldom confined to vacation periods. Only 49 (9 percent) of the children under 16 years of age who worked during the preceding year reported that they were employed only in the school-vacation period. The other 483 children worked during the time the Hidalgo County schools were in session, four-fifths of them in 8 or more weeks of the school year, and over one-fifth in 24 or more school weeks.[8]

Employment during the school term was rarely limited to a few hours after school or to Saturdays and Sundays. The description of the children's working hours has indicated that, on days when they went to work, they usually were away from home from early morning until late afternoon or evening. Moreover, the opportunity to work in the fields had to be taken when weather, market, and crop conditions permitted, without regard to the days of the week. Work during school hours was, therefore, inevitable in most weeks in which a child was employed on 1 or more days.

The necessity of working during schooltime to the extent that has been described obviously would tend to keep children from enrolling in school. One-third (164) of the children under 16 who worked during the school term did not go to school at any time within the year. On the other hand, two-thirds (319) of the boys and girls who worked also attended school. Often they attended for only part of the year, enrolling late or withdrawing early in order to work. Pablo, for example, who was 14 years old and had enrolled in 7 different school years, registered at the beginning of the school term each year but attended only until the opening of the season for harvesting vegetables. In the 1940–41 school year, he enrolled when school opened and with-

[8] The figures on employment and school attendance in this paragraph and in the succeeding one relate to the year preceding the date of interview in January, February, or March 1941, and to the portions of the 1939–40 and 1940–41 school years that fell within this year.

drew on November 25, attending 44 days altogether. He was in the third grade. In some families an effort was made to give all the children as great an opportunity as possible to attend school. One mother explained, "I can't keep both my children in school every day because if their father works alone he can only make $4 a week, while if one of the boys works with him, they can earn $6 or $7." Therefore, she alternated days of attendance for the two boys.

Why Children Were out of School.

When boys and girls were not enrolled in school, it was generally found that a combination of circumstances arising from poverty was responsible, and among these circumstances the need for the children to work was usually predominant. In this the boys and girls in the study were typical of the total group of agricultural laborers' children in the area, who were reported by the school officials to be out of school mainly because their families considered it essential for them to help in earning a living.

For most of the 501 boys and girls aged 6 to 17 years who were out of school, their families reported what they considered to be the chief cause for their children's nonenrollment in the current school year. These reasons are listed in table 16. Although a large majority of the boys and girls 12 years of age or older were reported to be out of school chiefly because of the "need to work," many 6- and 7-year-old children and a few 8-year-olds were considered by their parents too young to go to school. Some girls in all age groups were needed at home for household duties or care of younger children, and other boys and girls were not enrolled because of lack of clothing, unsatisfactory school adjustments, or a variety of other reasons. Fourteen children 6 to 11 years of age were among the group in the community that had been refused admission by the schools, with the explanation that they were "too young." [9] that the school was already "overcrowded," or, in the case of migratory children who presented themselves for enrollment in November, December, and January, that it was "too late in the term."

Why children had never attended school.—Among the children and young people who were not enrolled in the current school year were 163 that had never attended. Thirty-four of these were boys and girls 12 to 17 years of age whose chance for schooling was presumably lost. There were also 29 children aged 8 to 11 and 100 of 6 to 7 years who had never entered any school, but it was likely that many of these younger children would subsequently enroll.

The 6- and 7-year-old children were out of school in most instances because they were considered not old enough to attend. Sometimes parents thought the school too far away or the adjustment to school too difficult for such young children. In addition, a number of children, who had reached their sixth birthdays after the opening of school the preceding fall, were not within the age group that the school authorities are required by law to admit to school. Some boys and girls as old as 7 and 8 had, moreover, been refused admission by the local schools on the ground that they were "too young," which

[9] Eight of these children apparently came within the province of the compulsory-school-attendance law, which requires school authorities to admit to school all children who are over 6 and not over 21 years of age at the beginning of the school year.

TABLE 16.—*Chief reasons for nonenrollment reported by families for children not enrolled in 1940–41 school year, by age group*

Reasons for nonenrollment	Children not enrolled in 1940–41 school year									
	Total		6 and 7 years		8 to 11 years		12 to 15 years		16 and 17 years	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	501		103		54		192		152	
Reason reported	482	100.0	98	100.0	48	(1)	185	100.0	151	100.0
Work	279	57.9	1	1.0	14		142	76.7	122	80.8
Parent considered child too young	66	13.7	64	65.3	2					
Needed at home	29	6.0	2	2.0	3		15	8.1	9	5.9
Lack of clothing	29	6.0	8	8.2	13		7	3.8	1	.7
Unsatisfactory school adjustment	20	4.1	2	2.0	2		9	4.9	7	4.6
School refused to admit child	14	2.9	9	9.2	5					
Illness or mental or physical handicap	11	2.3	1	1.0	3		4	2.2	3	2.0
Mobility of family	8	1.7	3	3.1	3		1	.5	1	.7
Other reasons	26	5.4	8	8.2	3		7	3.8	8	5.3
Reasons not reported	19		5		6		7		1	

[1] Percentages not shown, since number of children was less than 50.

doubtless spread the impression in the community that children of this age also were ineligible for school enrollment. The following cases illustrate some of the circumstances under which children were refused admission by the schools:

Marcos was 8 years old. The mother said that when he tried to enroll "the teacher would not take him" and that the school nurse, also, said he was not old enough.

Eduardo was 7 years old. His mother took him to school in September 1940 and was told that there were "too many already enrolled."

Matilda was 9 years old. The mother reported that this child had been sent to school in 1939 and also in 1940 when the family returned from cotton picking about December 1. The school refused to accept her both years because it was "late in the school year." In this family there was also a younger daughter, who was 7. The mother commented regarding this child: "The school would probably refuse to accept her late, too, as they did my older child."

Other causes that prevented the younger children from entering school included the need of the family for the earnings of the child, need for his help at home, and inability of the family to provide suitable clothing. The following excerpts from family interviews illustrate further the circumstances under which young children were deprived of school experience.

Felipe was 9 years old. He had picked cotton for 25 weeks during the migratory period in the preceding year. His mother reported that his earnings were needed and that, consequently, he had never been to school. In addition, the family felt that it had never been located in one place long enough to permit the boy to go to school.

Ramona was 9 years old. For the past year she had kept house and cooked for the family. The mother was a widow and had to work. Ramona was the only member of the family available for housework, and therefore the mother did not see how she could "ever send Ramona to school."

Carmen was 8 years old and had never been to school because she had acted as nurse to her blind 5-year-old brother.

Angela was 7 years old. "Although the family regarded schooling as important, the parents were too poor even to consider school as a possibility," the Children's Bureau representative commented. "Apparently no one had ever thought of sending Angela to school. Angela had no shoes or dress of her own."

While nearly all the older boys and girls who had never been to school reported that they were not enrolled in the current year because of the need to work, it was found that some of them were deprived of school when small because they lived on isolated farms. Later on, when they moved nearer to a school, they were needed as wage earners. Other young people who had lived in towns all their lives had nevertheless had no school experience. A few brief descriptions of the situations that had barred the older boys and girls from education follow:

The Servando boys were 14 and 17 years old. Their family had lived in the country near Robstown, Tex., when they were small, and the school was so far away that the mother said: "It was better to send the boys into the fields to work with their father than to send them to school alone." Therefore, when they were 6 and 7 years of age they were helping their father in the fields, and by the time they were 8 they were working for hire. Since that time the family had always regarded their earnings as essential.

Leandro was 17 years old. At the age of 4 months he was adopted by his present foster parents. He had never attended school, although he was born and reared in the county seat, because, the family reported, they were "too poor and the child has had to work since he was old enough to earn."

Alfredo was 17 years old. His father, the son of a Mexican school teacher, finished normal school in Mexico. Alfredo, who was born in the United States, had never attended school. The family had had a hard time making ends meet and the earnings of the boy were considered a necessity. The father was teaching his son to read Spanish, but the boy complained of being too tired to study after a day's work.

Why children previously enrolled had left school.—The 338 boys and girls who last attended school at some time previous to the 1940–41 school year included 28 children under 12, 173 who were 12 to 15, and 137 who were 16 or 17 years of age. The case histories of these children and young people indicate that most of them had permanently withdrawn from school. Among the younger children there were, however, a few exceptions, for example, Reinaldo, who was 8 years old. Reinaldo had attended school during the preceding year in another Texas county. When the family came to Hidalgo County on January 8, they sent him to school with his older brothers and sisters. The school accepted the older children but refused to enroll Reinaldo. The mother presumed it was because he was "too young." She intended to send him to school the following year.

The most frequent reason for quitting school was the "need to work." In many instances, the children had no other choice than to leave, because of the incapacity or death of the chief wage earner in the family. Typical of such situations was that of 14-year-old Andres, who had dropped out of school soon after he was 13, when his father had died. His mother said that Andres "was bright" and that she "hated to have him leave school," but after his father's death his help was essential to support the family.

Many children 12 years of age or over took it for granted that they were "too old" for school since they were "old enough to work." For example, Esperanza, who was 13 years old, reported that she quit school during the preceding year and did not plan to return because she was "old enough to work." She had employment in 38 weeks of the preceding year.

Although the "need to work" either at home or in the fields was the most frequent cause of withdrawal from school, sometimes combined with it was the explanation that the children had completed the highest grades in the Latin-American schools near their homes. The circumstances that prevented these children from transferring to the "other" schools illustrate the reasons for the falling off in enrollments of Spanish-speaking children throughout the area after completion of the grades offered in their neighborhood schools. A number of families said that if there had been higher grades in these schools their children could have continued, but that they could not provide the lunch money, school supplies, and better clothing that would be necessary if the children went to the "other" schools, where they would meet all the children in the community.

Educational Status of the Children

The children in this study were seldom equipped with even the rudiments of an elementary education when they left school. For most of them, limited attendance coupled with lack of knowledge of English made normal grade progress impossible. The educational experience of many children was epitomized by one mother, who said: "School

is very hard for children who don't know English, when they have to work most of the time and miss school."

Total School Attendance.

The extent to which the children lacked opportunity for normal progress in school because of their brief and interrupted periods of attendance is indicated by data on the number of years in which they had enrolled and on their total months of school attendance. This information came in general from records made available to the Children's Bureau and the Office of Education through the cooperation of the Hidalgo County schools.

Number of years enrolled.—In addition to the fact that many children and young people in the study had never entered school, attendance for children who did enroll was usually limited to a brief span of years. This is most clearly shown by the record of number of years of enrollment for the older boys and girls. Of the 310 young people 14 to 17 years of age who had at some time attended school, 257 had withdrawn before the current school year, leaving only 53 or one-sixth of them still in school at these ages. One-tenth of the 257 boys and girls, who may be presumed to have ended their education, had attended in but one year, and half had enrolled in fewer than 5 different school years. Only one-fifth had enrolled during as many as 7 different years, the number of years a child would have attended if he began school at 7, when compulsory school attendance begins in Texas, and enrolled each year up to 14 years of age. The children's schooling was sometimes curtailed by failure to enroll till 8 years of age or older, but the withdrawal of many children at an early age, usually to become full-time wage earners, was a much more important factor.

The 53 young people aged 14 to 17 who were still in school had enrolled in at least 5 school years in most (45) cases, and more than half of them (28) had attended in at least 7 years. Eight of these boys and girls had enrolled in 9 or more years. Children were able to continue in school as long as this, however, only through great determination on their own part and considerable sacrifice on the part of their families. For example, Valentino, who was 16 years old and had attended school 10 years, was able to continue his education only because he worked in his uncle's grocery store after school every day and on Saturdays and Sundays. For 44 hours' work in the store each week, this uncle paid Valentino $2 and his meals during working hours. His mother commented that although he was in the ninth grade and she would like him to complete high school if possible, she did not encourage him to continue in school because it was so difficult to get enough food for others in the family. But since he liked school and insisted on going, she "didn't mind" his attending as long as he earned $2 a week, which was sufficient for his own support.

Amount of attendance.—The relatively few weeks of school attendance recorded for the children during the 1940–41 school year showed how much they were out of school in years when they were enrolled. Sometimes during their first year or so of school, children attended comparatively regularly, but as they grew older and their capacity to earn increased, their attendance usually decreased. The school history of 15-year-old Cristina illustrates the gradual reduction in

attendance that often preceded withdrawal. Cristina began school when she was 8 and withdrew when she was 13, after having enrolled in 4 school years. The first year she attended 147 days, the second 140 days, the third 73 days, and finally in the fourth year only 31 days. Her 13-year-old sister had a similar record. She enrolled when 8 and withdrew when 12, after enrolling 5 years. During the period in school, her attendance by year was 136 days, 110 days, 75 days, 42½ days, and 38½ days. Both girls left school to work because the family was dependent on their earnings.

A record of total school attendance from the time of first enrollment was available for 355 boys and girls between 6 and 18 years who were enrolled in the current school year. As would be expected, none of the 11 children aged 6 reporting and only 10 of the 38 who were 7 years old had yet attended a number of days, equivalent to more than 1 full year.[10] The fact that 49 of the 217 children aged 8 to 11 reporting and 22 as old as 12 and 13 years had attended school the equivalent of only 1 school year or less was, however, of much greater concern, since for these boys and girls so small an amount of attendance obviously represented a serious curtailment of education. Among the 89 boys and girls aged 12 to 17 reporting, there were 25 who had attended school a number of days equal to only 3 years or less and only 27 who had been in school the equivalent of more than 5 full years.

Complete records on school attendance were available also for 82 children and young people who had not enrolled during the current school year. All these boys and girls were at least 10 years old, and most (63) were 14 years of age or over. Yet 17 of them, approximately one-fifth, had attended school a number of days equivalent to less than one full year; 41, or one-half, had attended the equivalent of 3 years or less; and only 2 had attended more days than would be equal to 7 full years before they dropped out of school.

Of the small group of children with almost perfect school-attendance records, several were from families in which the chief wage earner had regular employment. For example, Cresencia, who was 14 years of age, had never missed more than 5 or 10 days in any of the 7 years in which she had enrolled. Her record showed that she attended 163 days, 170 days, 165 days, 166 days, 171 days, 172 days, and 166 days. Cresencia lived with her mother, grandmother, grandfather, and uncle. While her uncle was the only wage earner and supported this family of five from his earnings of only $1 per day, he had employment 6 days of every week in the year as a farm hand in a citrus grove. In bad weather the grower always found some work for him. The security of even this small income undoubtedly was of great importance to this family. The comparative stability of their economic status was reflected in the fact that they had managed to acquire three goats, several calves, and some chickens. Although the family was poor, the certainty that minimum food and clothing requirements would be met very probably

[10] The figures on years of attendance in this section represent the total number of days attended during the child's school life, as shown by the school records and by supplementary information from the family interviews. The Hidalgo County schools were in session an average of 175 days each year. Since most pupils are normally absent some days during the year for reasons such as illness, bad weather, and road conditions, 160 days was selected by the Office of Education as the norm to be used in translating into years the data on days of attendance.

accounted for Cresencia's ability to attend school regularly. She was one of the few children in the study who had gone as far as the fifth grade.

School Grade.

The degree to which the children's educational achievement was restricted by their abbreviated school attendance, their general language handicap, and other factors is indicated by an analysis of their unsatisfactory grade status. Among these boys and girls there was a great piling up in the first and prefirst grades, comparable with that noted among the total group of children attending Latin-American schools in the area.

The large proportion of the boys and girls enrolled during 1940–41 who were in the first-grade group is shown in table 17.[11] All the 6- and 7-year-old children reporting, together with four-fifths of those aged 8 and 9 and one-fifth of those aged 10 to 13, were still below the second-grade level. No child under 10 and few (8 percent) of those who were 10 and 11 had progressed beyond the third grade. Moreover, one-half (49 percent) of the 12- and 13-year-old children and 8 of the 43 aged 14 and 15 were in the third or a lower grade. There were only 5 boys and girls in a grade as high as the sixth among the 109 aged 12 and 13 reporting and only 19 among the 52 who were 14 to 17 years of age. Since these children and young people were still in school, it was likely, however, that a few of them would progress to slightly higher grades before ending their education.

The grade achievement of the boys and girls who had previously been in school but who were not enrolled in the 1940-41 school year was even more unsatisfactory, as table 18 shows. One-fourth of the boys and girls 14 to 17 years of age, for example, had left school from the first grade, though every youth of these ages who was still attending was in a higher grade. Less than half of the out-of-school youth 14 to 17 years of age had reached the fourth grade, compared with more than four-fifths of the group of the same ages who were in school. The discouragement and loss of interest resulting when children were not promoted to higher grades but were required to repeat the same work, often several times over, was clearly an important factor in causing them to drop out of school.

A relatively large proportion (one-fourth) of the out-of-school youth of 14 to 17 years had ended their education in the fourth grade, owing partly to the difficulties attending transfer to the "other school" from a neighborhood school offering only the first four grades and partly to the fact that the opportunity rooms in most of the Latin-American schools were designated as the fourth grade. Only 5 boys and girls, all of whom had passed their sixteenth birthdays, had gone as far as the seventh grade before leaving school, despite the provision in the Texas school law that children between 12 and 13 years of age may be exempted from school attendance to assist in

[11] Since nearly all the children in the study came from Spanish-speaking families and attended irregularly, most of them were among the group required by the schools to enroll initially in the prefirst grade and to spend at least 2 years in the school before being promoted to the second grade.

All children receiving instruction below the second-grade level have, however, been classed for the purposes of this study as in the first grade, because the program and teaching methods used in the prefirst grade were found by the Office of Education to be indistinguishable from those of the first grade.

TABLE 17.—*School grades of children enrolled in 1940–41 school year, by age group*

Last grade attended	Children enrolled in 1940–41 school year													
	Total		6 and 7 years		8 and 9 years		10 and 11 years		12 and 13 years		14 and 15 years		16 and 17 years	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	497		58		120		156		110		44		9	
Grade reported	493	100.0	58	100.0	118	100.0	156	100.0	109	100.0	43	(1)	9	(1)
1st grade	208	42.2	58	100.0	93	78.8	45	28.9	12	11.0				
2d grade	84	17.0			20	17.0	40	25.6	20	18.3	4			
3d grade	88	17.9			5	4.2	58	37.2	21	19.3	4			
4th grade	51	10.4					9	5.8	32	29.4	10			
5th grade	37	7.5					3	1.9	19	17.4	13		2	
6th grade	14	2.8					1	.6	3	2.8	7		3	
7th grade	6	1.2							2	1.8	3		1	
8th grade and over	5	1.0									2		3	
Grade not reported	4				2				1		1			

[1] Percentages not shown, since number of children was less than 50.

the support of their families. Since these boys and girls had not enrolled in school during 1940–41, the school grades that they had last attended no doubt represented in practically all cases the total extent of their schooling and showed how inadequate was their preparation for wage earning and citizenship. When to the educational handicap of these children—most of them native-born—is added the fact that they came from and lived among non-English-speaking people, it appears inevitable that most of them will be functionally illiterate as adults.

TABLE 18.—*Last school grades attended by children enrolled prior to 1940–41 school year only, by age group* [1]

Last grade attended	Children enrolled prior to 1940–41 school year only									
	Total		6 to 11 years		12 and 13 years		14 and 15 years		16 and 17 years	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	338		28		53		120		137	
Grade reported	323	100.0	22	(1)	50	100.0	118	100.0	133	100.0
1st grade	95	29.4	16		20	40.0	31	26.3	28	21.0
2d grade	53	16.4	4		8	16.0	17	14.4	24	18.0
3d grade	55	17.0	2		14	28.0	20	17.0	19	14.3
4th grade	66	20.5			4	8.0	26	22.0	36	27.1
5th grade	38	11.8			4	8.0	17	14.4	17	12.8
6th grade	11	3.4					7	5.9	4	3.0
7th grade	2	.6							2	1.5
8th grade and over	3	.9							3	2.3
Grade not reported	15		6		3		2		4	

[1] Percentage not shown, since number of children was less than 50.

Age-Grade Status.

Few children in this study were found to be in the school grades normal for their ages. Frequently the older boys and girls were overage for their grades by as many as 4 or 5 years and, consequently, were in the same class with children so much younger that they felt stupid, humiliated, and out of place. Moreover, the books used and teaching procedures employed were seldom adjusted to the needs of overage children.

A more significant picture of the children's school situation can be obtained by considering their grade attainment in relation to their ages than can be derived from their grades alone. For this reason, the age-grade status of each child in this study was calculated as of the current school year or, in the cases of children no longer enrolled, the school year last attended. The children were then classified in general accordance with an age-grade formula developed by the United States Office of Education. A child whose school age was 6 was considered normal if in the first grade, as was a child with a school age of 7, if in the first or second grade; a child with a school age of 8, if in the second or third grade; and so forth.

In every age group from 10 to 17 years at least 95 percent of the children and young people were found to be overage for their grades (table 19). Nearly half of the boys and girls who were 10 or 11 and three-fourths of those who were 12 or older were overage

TABLE 19.—*Age-grade status of children enrolled in 1940–41 or previous school years, by age group*

Age-grade status	Children currently or previously enrolled in school											
	Total		6 to 9 years		10 and 11 years		12 and 13 years		14 and 15 years		16 and 17 years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	835		189		173		163		164		146	
Age-grade status reported	747	100.0	182	100.0	162	100.0	147	100.0	140	100.0	116	100.0
Underage—1 year	1	.1									1	.9
Normal	76	10.2	61	33.5	4	2.5	8	5.4	1	.7	2	1.7
Overage	670	89.7	121	66.5	158	97.5	139	94.6	139	99.3	113	97.4
1 year	112	15.0	58	31.9	26	16.0	9	6.1	12	8.6	7	6.0
2 years	187	25.0	60	33.0	55	34.0	31	21.1	24	17.1	17	14.7
3 years	153	20.5	3	1.6	46	28.4	40	27.2	38	27.2	26	22.4
4 years	115	15.4			24	14.8	37	25.2	31	22.1	23	19.8
5 years	66	8.8			7	4.3	16	10.9	24	17.1	19	16.4
6 years	23	3.1					5	3.4	6	4.3	12	10.3
7 years or more	14	1.9					1	.7	4	2.9	9	7.8
Age-grade status not reported	88		7		11		16		24		30	

for their grades by 3 or more years. There were 37 young people who were overage by 6 or more years.

Two circumstances accounted for the extent to which the children were overage for their grades. As has been noted, many did not enter school until past the normal age of 6 or 7 years. Moreover, they usually did not make normal progress after they enrolled, for reasons such as irregular attendance and the general practice of not promoting Spanish-speaking children to the second grade until they had been in school at least 2 years.

The history of the school attendance of Francisca Gomez, who quit school when she was 13 and in the third grade, was similar to that of many children who were considerably overage for their grade. Francisca's mother and father had both died before she was 2 and she was left in the care of her grandmother, who held the opinion that it was more important for Francisca to learn to work and to earn her living than to go to school. The child began school when she was 9 and during the 4 years she was in school she worked in the fields regularly on 2 or 3 days of each week. According to the school records she attended but 75 days, 23 days, 124 days, and 101 days. Although normally a child of 13 would have progressed to the sixth or seventh grades, in Francisca's case, in view of her brief and interrupted attendance, it was surprising that she had gone even as far as the third grade.

Humiliation because of having to attend classes with much smaller and younger children caused many boys and girls who had been unable to enter school at the normal age to dislike school so much that they were glad to leave it though they had almost no education. For example, Maria, a girl of 15, had left school to work when she was 13 and only in the second grade. Her mother said that "Maria was not sorry to leave school to go to work because she was big for her age and ashamed to be in a class with smaller children."

Grade Progress.

The children's unsatisfactory progress during their years in school is most plainly shown when their grades are related to the number of years they had been enrolled. According to generally accepted educational standards, it is normal for a child to complete one grade each year he is in school. Thus, a child who was in his fourth year of enrollment would be considered to be making normal progress if in the fourth grade, to be retarded if in the third or a lower grade, and to be accelerated if in the fifth or a higher grade.

In comparison with this standard, 16 of the 60 children under 8 years of age for whom information was available were already retarded,[12] because they had been in school more than 1 year and had not yet been promoted to the second grade. Some of the 16 enrolled initially in the grade designated as "prefirst" and transferred to the first grade the following year. Since the work done was basically the same in both these grades, this transfer did not, however, represent grade progress as that term is used in this study.[13]

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[12] Grade progress was calculated as of the 1940–41 school year for children enrolled during that year. In the cases of children not enrolled in 1940–41, it was calculated as of the school year last attended.

[13] See p. 45, footnote 11.

TABLE 20.—*Grade progress of children enrolled in 1940–41 or previous school years, by age group*

Grade progress	Children currently or previously enrolled in school													
	Total		6 and 7 years		8 and 9 years		10 and 11 years		12 and 13 years		14 and 15 years		16 and 17 years	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	835		61		128		173		163		164		146	
Grade progress reported	798	100.0	60	100.0	125	100.0	166	100.0	154	100.0	156	100.0	137	100.0
Accelerated—1 year	7	.9							1	.6	2	1.3	4	2.9
Normal	200	25.1	44	73.3	30	24.0	23	13.9	26	16.9	42	26.9	35	25.6
Retarded	591	74.0	16	26.7	95	76.0	143	86.1	127	82.5	112	71.8	98	71.5
1 year	311	38.9	16	26.7	71	56.8	69	41.6	58	37.7	56	35.9	41	29.9
2 years	169	21.2			23	18.4	50	30.1	40	26.0	30	19.2	26	19.0
3 years	84	10.5			1	.8	22	13.3	26	16.9	18	11.5	17	12.4
4 years	23	2.9					2	1.2	3	1.9	7	4.5	11	8.0
5 years	4	.5									1	.7	3	2.2
Grade-progress status not reported	37		1		3		7		9		8		9	

Of the boys and girls 8 to 17 years of age reporting, nearly four-fifths (78 percent) were retarded by at least 1 year and often by 3 or more years. Twenty-seven boys and girls, aged 10 to 17, were retarded 4 or 5 years. Children who had made normal progress or better constituted a small minority in all age groups from 8 years upward, although the exact proportion varied considerably between the different groups, as table 20 shows. The proportion was smallest among the children 10 and 11 years of age, of whom all but 14 percent were retarded. Above that age the proportion of boys and girls making normal progress increased somewhat, probably because the most retarded children tended to drop out at an early age, whereas the less retarded ones were more likely to continue in school. But even among the boys and girls aged 14 to 17 years, only 26 percent were normal and only 2 percent accelerated.

A striking indication of the gravity of the educational situation revealed by these figures is provided by comparative statistics on grade progress that are available for 569,536 white children 6 to 11 years of age who were enrolled in the Texas schools in 1937–38. Table 21 shows the proportions accelerated, normal, and retarded among these children and among 351 white children of the same ages in this study.

TABLE 21.—*Grade progress of children 6 to 11 years of age in the study, compared with 569,536 white children enrolled in Texas schools, 1937–38* [1]

Grade progress	Percent distribution of white children 6 to 11 years of age	
	Included in this study	Enrolled in Texas schools
Total reporting	100.0	100.0
Accelerated		2.2
Normal	27.6	64.0
Retarded	72.4	33.8
1 year	44.4	25.5
2 years	20.8	6.5
3 years	6.6	1.5
4 years	.6	.3

[1] Material furnished by the U. S. Office of Education.

It is seen that only one-third of this large and representative group of Texas school children were retarded, compared with nearly three-fourths of the children from the families interviewed.

Even children considered by the Hidalgo County schools to have good intelligence were often retarded. Serena, for example, who was 11 years old and reported by her teacher as a "B" student, was in only the third grade, although she had been enrolled 6 years. Her family had migrated for cotton picking in northern Texas for the past 4 years, and consequently she had missed the beginning of each school term. Of the 175 days in the average school year, she had attended the following number each year she was enrolled: 99 days, 130 days, 103 days, 144 days, 135 days, and 109 days. The loss of schooltime indicated by these figures, from the school records, explains at least in part why Serena, though regarded as a good student, was retarded 3 years.

The school progress of the children of non-Spanish-speaking agricultural laborers included in the study was usually as limited as that of the children of Mexican descent. Ten-year-old Roy, who was born in Oklahoma though his permanent home had been in Hidalgo County since he was very small, was an example. He had enrolled in school 5 years, attending the following number of days each year: 42 days, 42 days, 14 days, 24 days, and 21 days. In each of these 5 years he enrolled in the first grade. Migration, work, and poverty all contributed to this record of insufficient attendance and consequent failure to progress in school. Since he first enrolled, Roy had twice migrated with his family to the cotton fields of northern Texas and, hence, had been out of the county during the opening months of 2 school years. He had worked with his family in the fields for the past 4 years and had missed much schooltime for that reason. In the sample week immediately preceding the date of interview, for example, he attended school only on Monday and then stayed away, to help gather cabbages. Of three children under 16 years who were in school in his family, he was the only one enrolled in the current school year, since his 14-year-old brother "had to work" and his 7-year-old brother lacked decent clothing. His mother said that it had been possible for Roy to enroll that year only because clothing had been given him. Both parents said that if they had had sufficient clothes for their children and "enough money," they would have been "glad to have the children in school."

The close relationship between family poverty, child labor, and unsatisfactory grade achievement and progress that this story reveals was typical of the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking children alike. The interference of work and poverty with school attendance was undoubtedly the greatest obstacle to a normal education for practically all boys and girls in the study, although there were other major obstacles, such as the general language handicap and the fact that the curriculum and school organization were often ill-adapted to the children's needs. Taken together, these circumstances so interfered with the children's schooling that very few of them obtained the basic essentials of an elementary education or knew the satisfaction of making normal progress in school.

THE HOMES

The homes of the field workers of Hidalgo County, whether situated in Spanish-speaking sections of the towns, in the open country along the canals and irrigation ditches, or in the transient settlements on the outskirts of the towns, were usually crude, small, and much overcrowded. The clay earth on which they stood turned into a sea of mud in the rainy season. On the bare earth between the dwellings, the children played, the laundry was done, and the families visited when weather permitted.

The approach to all the homes was along rough roads or paths beside the irrigation ditches. Although there were sidewalks, paved roads, and a sewage system in parts of some of the towns, in the settlements where the field workers lived no such utilities were provided. Open-pit privies serving several large households were the only type

of toilet available to any of the families. Their dwellings seldom provided adequate protection from the weather and rarely had access to a safe water supply.

Most of the field workers in the study considered the houses in which they were living at the time of interview as their permanent residences. Families who migrated from the valley each year frequently returned to the same dwellings. They often left some members of the family behind, or padlocked their houses before they went away.[1]

The houses had sometimes been built by their occupants and were often owned by them. At times the families also owned the land on which their houses stood, but more frequently they paid rent for their lots, usually at the rate of $1 per month, or paid installments of perhaps $5 a month toward the purchase of the land. Other families, who rented their houses outright, generally paid a little more than $1 per week for the house and ground.

Some young people lived after marriage in houses built upon their parents' land, for which they were often charged no rent. This arrangement reflected the strong clannish feeling among many of the Spanish-speaking families. In some neighborhoods, a sort of tribal living had developed. Groups of families, related by blood, lived in houses clustered together on land belonging to some member of the family. While they maintained separate households, they often tided each other over periods of illness, slack employment, or other misfortunes.[2]

The usual dwelling was a small wooden house, unpainted, and of makeshift construction. Generally there was one sleeping and living room, with a still more crudely constructed "kitchen house," either built separately or attached to the main structure in the rear. Occasionally there was more than one sleeping room. On the other hand, some large families cooked and slept in but one room. A few families had frame houses that were in comparatively good repair and had such luxuries as a wooden floor in the sleeping room. But many dwellings, especially in the rural settlements, were very primitive. Often the occupants had patched them together from scraps of wood, tin, palm branches, tule, or a combination of these materials. Some of these houses had no windows, and most of them had dirt floors even in the sleeping quarters. In the transient settlements, where most of the English-speaking workers lived, the housing consisted of tents, trailers, and shacks.

In the rainy season the flimsy roofs and walls of the cruder dwellings were poor protection against the weather, and the houses often became flooded. Owing to the absence of any drainage system, water accumulated in the streets and roads and the people were sometimes marooned.

The usual furnishings of the homes included one or two beds in the room that served as living and sleeping quarters and a rolled pallet that was spread on the floor or bare ground at night as a bed for the children. Sometimes, however, there was no bed and everyone slept on the floor. A trunk or chest of drawers and a chair were often the chief items of furniture, though sometimes there was also an open

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[1] Living conditions during the migratory period are described briefly on pp. 13, 16, and 17.

[2] The clannish tradition of the families studied was reflected also in the large family groups found living together as one household. See p. 10.

brazier for heating purposes. The kitchens were equipped with a wood- or oil-burning stove, together with some sort of table or improvised substitute, and perhaps benches or boxes to sit on.

For the large families in this study, which averaged 6.6 members, the one- or two-room dwellings provided very little space. In nearly two-thirds of the 342 households visited there were three or more persons per room, and in almost one-tenth there were as many as seven or more persons per room. Even these figures do not fully indicate the degree of overcrowding, because one of the rooms, the kitchen, usually could not be used for sleeping purposes. The extent to which crowded sleeping quarters precluded proper rest conditions for the children is described in the next section of this report, the section dealing with the children's health.[3]

In justifying the extensive use of children in harvesting crops, an official of a packing shed in the valley said that he thought it was "better for the children to go to the fields to work than to stay at home, because the homes were so poor." The house of the Morales family was an example of the barren and overcrowded dwellings in which the children in this study were reared. The father, mother, and four children 15 years of age or over occupied a very small one-room wooden house that they considered their permanent home. In this room was a table, an oil stove, a trunk, and one bottomless chair, but no bed. A rolled pallet stood in the corner. The mother was taking her siesta on the bare floor when the interviewer arrived.

Another family, consisting of a 13-year-old girl, her older brother, and their grandmother, were interviewed at 10 o'clock on a cold, rainy night when their house appeared particularly desolate. They had just returned from a long day spent on the road and working in a water-soaked field and were wet, tired, and hungry when they reached their one-room board shack. Just inside the door was a box, holding a candle that lighted up the contents of the room—a bed with springs, on which was a mattress that had been rolled to keep it dry, a stool, two chairs, and a chest of drawers. Their kitchen was in a nearby tule hut. This dwelling was owned by the grandmother and had been her home for many years.

The children in the households of the non-Spanish-speaking families sometimes had even more bleak surroundings and less adequate housing in the settlements of transient workers in which they lived. For example, a father and his three sons, aged 10, 13, and 15, who had come to the valley to work in the citrus groves, had lived from November through February in a pup tent. Their only household equipment was a small oil stove and two mattresses, raised from the ground by springs. Often the 10-year-old boy came home to this tent from school, prepared his own meal, and went to bed when it got dark whether or not his father and older brothers had returned from work.

Sanitary Facilities

The toilet facilities available to these households consisted of open-pit privies, usually shared by several families. In one area, for example, 6 privies served 26 families. In another settlement in one of

[3] See p. 56.

the larger towns, instances were reported of 1 privy serving as many as 13 large families. Usually the pits were very shallow, and they often overflowed during the rainy season. The privy sheds were ramshackle affairs made of scrap materials such as tin, old lumber, and cardboard, often without a door or with only an old blanket or canvas draped over the doorway. One shed had been made out of an old automobile. For a transient settlement composed of trailers, cars, tents, and 2 or 3 shacks, there was 1 privy, marked "Women Only," which had been constructed of cardboard about 2 years previously and now was broken in several places. Over the door a torn piece of a tent had been hung. There was no privy for men.

Water Supply

The families who lived in the towns obtained city water from outdoor spigots, and those who lived in the rural settlements dipped water from irrigation canals or ditches or used wells that probably tapped the irrigation system. In some localities the city water supply met the standards set by the State department of health, but this was not true in other places. In most cases two or more families drew water from the same spigot and paid 50 cents to $1.50 a month for the water supplied by it. While frequently the water spigot was centrally located near several homes, sometimes water had to be carried one-eighth to one-quarter of a mile or more from spigot to house. One family walked a mile and a half to the spigot where they obtained city water.

The irrigation ditches and canals from which many of the rural households obtained water were uncemented and often choked with weeds. They were used for bathing and swimming as well as for drinking purposes, and undoubtedly were often contaminated from the numerous open-pit privies, pigsties, and collections of refuse along their margins. The water from most of the wells was salty and apparently very caustic; for this reason some families preferred irrigation water. It was not customary to boil or strain the well or irrigation water used for drinking purposes. The lack of a safe water supply was doubtless an important cause of the serious illnesses and high mortality rate among children in these families.

THE HEALTH OF THE CHILDREN AND CONDITIONS AFFECTING THEIR HEALTH

In order to obtain a more complete picture of the health of the children and the conditions under which they lived, the Children's Bureau assigned a physician to make a special health survey for a sample group of boys and girls chosen from those in the general study and to obtain information on the health services available in Hidalgo County. Data on obstetric care and infant mortality in the 342 families visited were also obtained through the general family interviews.

Health of the Children

The special health survey covered all children under 18 years of age in 55 families selected at random from among the 342 that were inter-

viewed. All these families were Spanish-speaking except 2, who were living temporarily in a trailer camp. Most of them were large. Only 11 had less than 3 children under 18 living at home; 20 had 3 or 4 children; and the other 24 had from 5 to 9 children, making a total of 240 boys and girls under 18 in the 55 families.

For each of these boys and girls information was obtained regarding sleeping accommodations, diet for a sample day, illnesses and medical care during the previous year, and—if the child was under 2—care during infancy. In addition, each of the 83 children 6 to 12 years of age was given a physical examination that included a clinical appraisal of nutritional status and certain selected laboratory examinations.

Sleeping Arrangements.

Sleeping arrangements conducive to proper rest for the children were rare among the families surveyed. It was a common custom, even in large families, for most of the members of the household to sleep in a single room. One-fourth of the children included in the health survey slept in the same room with 8 to 10 other persons; slightly more than half of them shared their sleeping room with at least 6 others; only about one-seventh of the children slept in rooms with as few as 1 or 2 other occupants.

Nearly a third (75) of the 240 children in the health survey slept on the floor or the ground, sometimes on a mattress, but more often (45 children) on only a blanket or a piece of canvas or cardboard. Of those children who slept on a bed or mattress, only 15 slept alone, nearly two-thirds slept with 2 or 3, or, in a few cases, 4 others persons.

The sleeping conditions in one of the small 1-room houses visited were typical for many families in the study. The family consisted of the father and mother and 5 of their 13 children, but shortly before the interview a married son and his wife had come to visit for "a few days" and had brought their own double bed. A second double bed was occupied by the mother, a 10-year-old son, and a 7-year-old daughter. The father and the 3 older boys slept on a cardboard on the dirt floor with quilts over them.

In most instances the children went to bed at dark and arose soon after daylight, so that, in the winter season at least, the sleeping hours of most of the children were probably adequate.

Diets.

The diets of the children were in general a simple fare, consisting principally of pinto or navy beans, rice, potatoes, and tortillas. Vegetables and fruits were eaten infrequently by many families because they did not like them, though there was ample opportunity to obtain them from the fields or packing sheds. Of the 55 families interviewed, only 28, approximately one-half, reported that they used vegetables or fruit frequently. Three families did not use them at all, and the other 24 used them only occasionally. One family stated that the father could get vegetables easily from the packing shed, but did not because the family did not like them. He did bring oranges from the groves but not grapefruit because, he said, grapefruit "thins the blood and causes TB."

After infancy, milk is used in only small amounts or not at all by most of the children. Of the children 2 years of age or older, slightly more than half drank no milk, and half of those who did take milk

used it only in tea or coffee. Only about one-fifth used as much as a pint of milk a day, and these were usually the younger children. Very rarely a family was found who owned a cow and was able to have fresh milk for the children to drink. There was no sanitary inspection of these individually owned cows.

In general, food was prepared three times a day, although mealtimes were irregular and the families seldom sat down to eat together. Most of the children ate frequently between meals and were often seen eating a plain tortilla or one filled with beans or left-overs. For children and adults who were working, lunch-time observances varied considerably. Those who had food at home that could be taken along to eat in the fields or on the highway, wherever the workers found themselves at midday, took a lunch with them. Others stopped along the way and bought a loaf of bread, which they divided among the members of the family who were present at lunch time. Sometimes the workers ate carrots that had just been gathered or had no food at all. One mother said she was willing to pack a lunch of tortillas, the only food the family usually had on hand, but that her 15-year-old son was ashamed to take along such a lunch and preferred to eat nothing during the time he was away from home, which sometimes was as long as 12 hours.

Special inquiry was made regarding the feeding of the 11 children under 2 years of age who were included in the health survey. All these infants had been breast-fed, and although the ages of 6 of them ranged from 16 months to 22 months, all but 1 of the 11 were still being breast-fed. Six of them were receiving complementary feedings of fresh cow's milk or evaporated milk; only for 2 of the 5 infants on fresh cow's milk was the milk boiled. Two children, aged 16 and 21 months, took cow's milk only in their coffee. There were only 2 occasions when the mothers of any of these infants had received advice from a physician regarding the infants' feeding: One was at the time of birth of an infant now 16½ months old; the other was when, at the age of 3 months, an infant now 5 months old had been taken to a physician because of colic.

Physical Examinations and Clinical Findings.

Physical examinations were given to the children from 6 through 12 years of age in the 55 families included in the health survey.[1] The total number of children examined was 83, of whom 44 were girls and 39 boys. Their ages were as listed in table 22.

TABLE 22.—*Numbers of boys and girls included in the health survey, by age group*

Age	Total	Boys	Girls
Total	83	39	44
6 and 7 years	22	10	12
8 and 9 years	19	4	15
10 and 11 years	30	19	11
12 years	12	6	6

[1] A few families had moved away between the time of the interviews and the physical examinations, so substitutes for these families were selected from the general survey lists. One mother refused to have her 6-year-old boy examined.

The appearance of these children, on the whole, suggested general good health, but physical examination revealed a variety of abnormal conditions more or less serious in nature.

An appraisal of the general nutritional status was made from the amount of subcutaneous fat, the muscle tone, color of skin and mucous membranes, and hemoglobin estimations. On the basis of these criteria the children were classified as well-nourished, undernourished, or poorly nourished. Nearly three-fourths of the children were considered to be well-nourished; 12 boys and 11 girls were classified as undernourished or poorly nourished. Only 4 children—all of them boys between 7 and 11 years of age—were considered poorly nourished.

As far as could be judged from hemoglobin determinations [2], there were no cases of anemia among these children. All of them had hemoglobin values within the range reported as normal for children 4 to 13 years of age (between 10 and 14 grams [3]). Only three boys had hemoglobin values below 12.0 grams; these were all 11.0 grams. Seven girls had values below 12.0 grams; of these, one was 10.5 and one 11.0; the others were all 11.5.

It is noteworthy that in a climate where there is practically year-around sunshine, nearly one-sixth of the children (6 boys and 6 girls) showed residual signs of early rickets. It is probable that until infants are able to run around many of them do not get into the sunshine regularly, and cod-liver oil is rarely given.

Many children had postural defects, although most of them were considered "moderate" or "mild" in degree. Only 23 percent of the 44 girls and 19 percent of the 39 boys had posture that could be classified as "good," but only 1 child, a girl, had posture classified as "poor." The rest were considered to have "fair" posture.

Lesions of the skin and scalp were found frequently. Many were infected abrasions, blisters, and insect bites. Minor skin conditions were so common among these children as to cause no concern to the families and were generally neglected. Nits were found on most of the heads and were often associated with a mild, scaling dermatitis or, in some cases, a definitely infected scalp. A large carbuncle-like abscess of the scalp was found in one of the children examined, and similar abscesses were observed in several children not examined. It was also common to see impetigo following the scratching of insect bites. Occasionally a child would be seen in the streets literally covered with this infection, which had been allowed to spread through neglect.

Thirty-two, or about two-fifths, of the children (17 boys and 15 girls) had positive reactions to the Mantoux tuberculin test, indicating that they had at some time been infected with tuberculosis. Clinical examination revealed significant lung findings in 4 of the children who had positive tuberculin tests, but since X-ray examinations were not available, it was not possible to determine definitely whether any of the children had tuberculosis in an active form. Two-fifths is a relatively high proportion of positive tuberculin tests for children 6 to 12 years old, but is not surprising in view of the prevalence of tuberculosis

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[2] Hemoglobin determinations were made by the Haden-Hauser method, using freshly drawn, unclotted venous blood.

[3] Griffith, J. P. Crozer, and Mitchell, A. Graeme: A Textbook of Pediatrics, third edition, revised 1941, p. 34. W. B. Saunders Co., Philadelphia.

in the county. The mortality rate for tuberculosis in Hidalgo County in 1939 was nearly 1.9 times the rate for Texas as a whole, and 2.5 times the rate for the entire United States.

In order to obtain a general picture of the health status as shown by physical examination of the 83 children, they were classified according to their apparent need for medical care. After reviewing the conditions found in the entire group, arbitrarily chosen classification standards were drawn up. Depending upon its nature or severity each condition was classified in one of the following groups: (*a*) Those conditions for which medical care was needed urgently; (*b*) those for which it was needed but not urgently; and (*c*) those for which medical observation or public-health-nursing supervision would probably be adequate for the time being.

Twenty-one children (12 boys and 9 girls) had conditions that were classified as calling for immediate medical care. Several had more than one such condition, so that there were altogether 29 such diagnoses for the 21 children. The conditions found for which immediate medical care seemed indicated were as follows:

Condition	*Number*
Skin infections or abscesses	6
Otitis media (acute or chronic)	6
Markedly impaired vision	6
Significant lung findings	5
Conjunctivitis	3
Temperature of 101.5° F. or over	2
Positive Kahn test	1

None of the children in whom these conditions were found appeared acutely ill. All were able to go to the clinic for examination, and, to superficial observation, they appeared quite well. Yet each had one or more conditions that, without suitable treatment, might lead to serious infection or to permanent handicap.

The conditions for which medical care was considered to be indicated but less urgent were those that appeared less serious in nature or severity. Twenty-seven children not in immediate need of medical care had such conditions; 9 of them had more than one condition that called for care of this type. In addition, 15 of the children already classified as in need of immediate medical care also had conditions that required medical care less urgently. Altogether, medical care not necessarily immediate seemed indicated for the treatment or observation of 55 conditions in 42 children.

The conditions for which medical care appeared to be indicated but not urgent were as follows:

Condition	*Number*
Heart murmurs or significant heart findings	18
Impacted cerumen, one or both ears	9
Markedly enlarged tonsils, one or both	8
Temperature 100.5° F. to 101.4°F	4
Urogenital abnormalities	4
Poor nutrition	4
Moderately defective vision	3
Perforated eardrum	1
Hemoglobin 10.5 grams	1
Subacute dermatitis	1
Lung findings	1
Mild conjunctivitis	1

Some medical observation or supervision by a public-health nurse seemed indicated for an additional 21 children, 6 of them because of more than one condition. In addition to the 21 children classified as needing medical observation only, there were 27 of the children who were found in need of medical treatment who also had conditions which, if they had occurred alone, would have called for observation. The conditions found that appeared to require such observation were: positive tuberculin reactions, 27 cases; undernutrition, 19 cases; moderately enlarged tonsils, 10 cases; subacute skin lesions, 1 case.

Classification of all the children examined, according to their apparent need for medical care, gives the following results:

TABLE 23.—*Types of medical care needed by children included in the health survey*

Type of medical care needed [1]	Number of children		
	Total	Boys	Girls
Total	83	39	44
Immediate	21	12	9
Not urgent	27	12	15
Observation	21	9	12
None	14	6	8

[1] Records were incomplete for 14 children; the mouth temperatures of some were not recorded, and some children did not cooperate in vision tests. They are classified on the basis of other findings.

There were only 8 girls and 6 boys who did not need any type of medical care or observation, but a total of 35 children (including those recommended for medical observation only), or about two-fifths of the total group, were in good physical condition except for minor findings.

The children examined were also classified according to the apparent urgency of their need for dental care.[4] Inspection of the teeth and gums was carried out by a physician; no examinations were made by dentists.

Thirty-one children (18 boys and 13 girls), or slightly more than one-third of the group examined, were classified as in urgent need of dental care. All but 5 were 8 years of age or over and had severe or moderate dental decay. No cases of severe inflammation of the gums were observed.

The group classified as needing dental care less urgently included 20 children (12 girls and 8 boys), 8 of whom apparently had only 1 decayed tooth. Twelve (8 boys and 4 girls) had a mild inflammation of the gums, not resembling the type associated with vitamin C deficiency; 8 of these children had decayed teeth also.

Many of the mouths examined showed poor dental hygiene, but there seemed to be little association between the cleanliness of the mouth and the amount of dental caries present. Twenty-two children were classified as in need of dental hygiene, but only half of these were classified as needing other dental care.

[4] The classifications, according to urgency of need for dental care, were as follows:
Dental care urgent: Severe or extensive caries at any age; more than 1 carious tooth in a child 8 years of age or older; severe gingivitis.
Dental care needed but not urgent: 1 carious tooth only, at any age; moderate or small amount of caries in a child under 8 years of age; mild gingivitis.
Dental hygiene needed: poor dental hygiene.

Inquiry was made of the parents of 240 of the children as to whether they had been seen by a dentist within the past year; only one child was found who had been to a dentist for a simple extraction. One other child was said to have had an "infected tooth"—apparently an alveolar abscess—incised and drained by a physician.

Twenty-one children (9 boys and 12 girls) showed no condition indicating need for dental care of any kind. If the 11 children who needed dental hygiene only were added to these, there would be a total of 32 who required no dental care at all. An additional 8 children who had only 1 carious tooth might be added to this group, giving a total of 40, or nearly half, of the children whose teeth were in good condition. None of the children, except the one already mentioned, had had the services of a dentist within the past year and probably had never visited a dentist.

Although all the children examined gave a general appearance of fairly good health, there were only 3 who were not found to be in need of some kind of medical or dental care. There seemed to be a slight trend toward better physical status among the girls examined than among the boys. Of the group of 83 children, nearly three-fifths had some condition that indicated a definite need for medical care other than simple observation, and approximately the same proportion were in need of dental care exclusive of dental hygiene.

Any comparison of these findings with those from examination of other groups of children would be misleading because of differences in the composition of the groups and in the methods of examination and classification. A general review of the findings reported from school health examinations in various parts of the country seems, however, to justify the impression that the proportion of children found to be in need of medical and dental care in this group of Hidalgo County children was, relatively speaking, not excessively high. This was particularly true with respect to the need for dental care. These results were surprising in view of the very unfavorable conditions under which most of these children lived.

Illnesses of the Children.

Inquiry as to the illnesses of the children included in the health survey brought answers that were difficult to interpret. Few families could remember with any accuracy when a child had been ill. Information as to the type of illness was often overlaid with superstition and, without diagnosis by a physician, illnesses were frequently reported simply as "fever," "stomach trouble," or "the evil eye."

The "evil eye" was thought by many families to be laid upon an infant when he was admired by a stranger if the stranger failed to touch him. The child would then sicken and die. One was always expected to stroke a child upon admiring him.

About the time the study was begun, an epidemic of influenza spread over the country. It was not surprising, therefore, that a large proportion of the illnesses of children reported were described as "flu," or, in the language of the Mexicans as "malicito" (the little disease) or "no me voy sin verte" (I will not leave without seeing you). Most of the cases were not severe and were treated at home with such home remedies as herbs, aspirin, lemonade, or patent medicines.

As nearly as could be ascertained from the families, 56 of the 240 children in the health survey had illness of some type during the

Dental services, like medical services, were rarely available for these children. There were no organized dental services in the county for children whose families could not pay a private dentist's fees.

Public-Health Nursing.

Seven public-health nurses were serving under the county health unit. Six of these were doing general public-health nursing, which included services to mothers and children; the seventh was serving at the venereal-disease clinic. Three of the nurses included school nursing among their responsibilities; two areas in the county had school nurses other than those employed by the health unit.

A nurse visited each of the schools in the districts studied, at regular times in the week. The nurses inspected the children referred to them by the teachers because of signs of illness. In some of the schools physical examinations had been given by physicians during the current school year to all the children, or to those in certain grades; in other schools, including most of those for children of Mexican stock, medical examinations were not given. Children found by the physician or nurse to be in need of medical care were referred to a private physician, but there was little follow-up to insure that the needed care was actually obtained, and no public provision was made for paying the doctors.

Obstetric Care

A very large proportion of Spanish-speaking mothers of the area employ midwives to attend them at delivery. In the county seat there were 48 deliveries in January 1941. Fourteen of the mothers were Anglo-American, and all these were attended by physicians; 34 were of Mexican stock, and of these only 9 were attended by physicians, whereas 25 were attended by midwives.

Occasionally physicians charge reduced fees for delivery of Mexican mothers. In one area local physicians had lowered their rates to match the fees charged by midwives, and in that section many Spanish-speaking mothers had employed the services of a physician.

There was no organized medical care for maternity patients in the county. It was said that an attempt had been made to conduct a prenatal clinic for a while, but the Mexican women would not take advantage of it because the examination offended their modesty. At the time of this survey the public-health nurses were giving general nursing supervision to expectant mothers who were known to them, and taking Wasserman tests and blood-pressure readings when the women would attend the "well-baby clinics" for supervision. Expectant mothers might be referred to the public-health nurses by physicians, midwives, or other patients, or the nurses might discover them in the course of their other duties.

If the nurse recognized evidence of a pathological condition during the course of her supervision of a prenatal patient, she might refer the woman to a private physician. In most cases the patient was too poor, however, to pay for medical care and was dependent upon the readiness of the local physician to give his care gratis.

Public-health nurses also gave postpartum nursing care. This service consisted principally in instructing the mother in hygienic care of herself and her baby and giving bedside care when needed. Patients were said to be referred to a physician when necessary.

Those mothers who employed a physician for delivery rarely visited him or called him before time for delivery. In view of this, and in view of the absence of organized prenatal clinics in the county, it was not surprising that an inquiry regarding the prenatal and postpartum medical care of the women in the families studied who had been pregnant during the past year showed that very few of these women had had such care. In the 342 families in the general survey there were 37 women who had been delivered within the previous year, 23 who were pregnant, and 2 who had been delivered and were again pregnant. Information was obtained regarding prenatal care for 58 of these women. Only 5 had had such care. Postpartum medical care was equally rare.

Of the 39 women who had given birth within the previous year, 14 were delivered by physicians, 20 by midwives, 2 were unattended. The attendant for 3 of the women is not known. Only 4 of the 39 were known to have been delivered in hospitals. Thirty-three of these women had no postpartum examination, 3 had a postpartum examination, and the information was not obtained for 3 women.

Childhood Mortality

In view of the lack of facilities for medical care of mothers and children, the fatalistic attitude of many of those of Mexican stock toward illness, particularly during infancy, and the poor living conditions, it would be expected that the mortality among children would be high. The findings of the study confirmed this expectation.

For 278 of the families included in the general survey, information was obtained as to the total number of children born alive and the number who had died under 18 years of age. In these families 1,927 children had been born alive; 445, or 23 percent of them, had died before reaching the age of 18; 290, or 15 percent, died under 1 year of age. Only a little over half (57 percent) of the infants who died under a year were attended by a physician, whereas of the children who died after the first year a considerably larger number (73 percent) had a physician in attendance.

No significant figures as to the causes of death among these children could be obtained because of the difficulty of obtaining accurate information from the mothers. Diarrhea was a frequent cause of death, as would be expected from the general lack of sanitation, the frequency with which the younger children in the health survey were reported to have had diarrhea, and the frequency of diarrhea as a cause of death for the county as a whole (16 percent of all deaths in 1939).

According to information obtained from local doctors, nurses, and teachers, tetanus is a not uncommon cause of infant death during the newborn period. Practices based on superstition, such as the use of cobwebs to coagulate the cord blood, lead to deaths from this cause. In one family four babies were said to have died between the ages of 8 and 11 days from "mosisuella," which probably means infantile tetanus.

The high incidence of tuberculosis in the county and the frequency with which the deaths of children were said by the mothers to have been due to convulsions suggest that many of the deaths may have been due to tuberculous meningitis. The vital-statistics records for the county did not, however, indicate that mortality from this cause was particularly high.

Family after family told of the loss of their babies or young children. Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez had had eight children. One of them died of diphtheria when a year and a half old, one died of malnutrition at 9 months, and one died of diarrhea at 5 months. Of the seven children born to the Morales family, only three were living at the time of the study. Of the other four, one died of pneumonia at 5 months, one died during the first day of life, a third was said to have died of "the evil eye" at the age of 1½ years, and the fourth died of "measles and a fever" at 3 years.

Three of the 13 Perez children died under the age of 1 month. A fourth child in this family died at the age of 20 months, because, according to the mother's story, the little girl had played near an anthill while her mother was confined to the house by illness, and had been bitten so badly by the ants that she died. In this same family 2 of the living children had been blind since birth.

Since the deaths of children in these families have occurred over an undetermined period of years, no direct comparison of the mortality in this group could be made with that in any other group of children. But that nearly one-fourth of the children born alive to these families should have died before reaching the age of 18, indicated a distressing waste of human life. The death of 15 percent of the infants during the first year of life gave an infant mortality rate approximately half again as high as that for the United States as a whole when the birth-registration area was first established in 1915, and more than three times as high as the present infant mortality rate for the country. The proportion of babies who died in their first year in these families was about twice what the rate for Texas was in 1933 when Texas was admitted to the birth-registration area.

Physical examination of the sample group of children did not show any definite evidence that the health of the children was especially unsatisfactory as a result of the adverse conditions under which they lived. But that these conditions did affect child health was demonstrated by the large proportion of children who had died. The idea at once springs to mind, though it cannot be proved, that it was only the fittest of the children born into this environment who survived early childhood, and, consequently, the children of school age were a selected group better able to withstand the health hazards to which they are exposed than a group of children would be who had been more carefully protected in their early years.

CONCLUSIONS

A picture of children at work as agricultural laborers at an early age, under conditions that deprived them of schooling and of other opportunities taken for granted for most children in the United States, emerges from this study of field workers' families in Hidalgo County. These people depended almost exclusively upon agricultural labor for a livelihood, but their field labor was characterized by irregular employment and by pitifully low rates of pay. So great an effort was necessary to obtain the very minimum of income needed if the families were to exist that the mothers and young children customarily worked in the fields with the fathers and older boys and

girls, and many families endured the hardships of migration to the cotton fields of northern Texas every summer and fall, when work was scarce at home, in order to obtain additional employment in cotton picking.

Relief was seldom available, no matter how insufficient the family's income. For the children, school attendance was regarded as a luxury because they were needed as wage earners; such educational opportunities as were available were far from adequate, and, in consequence, many children who left school were scarcely literate. The situation with regard to health protection was little better. Living quarters were overcrowded, provided inadequate shelter, and lacked sanitation. Diets were exceedingly limited. Medical care was almost unknown.

In few if any respects did the English-speaking families fare better than those of Mexican descent. Though predominantly Spanish-speaking in heritage, the agricultural laborers in the study included some families of English-speaking background, and among these families the standards of living were found to be as low and child labor quite as prevalent as among the families of Mexican stock.

In agriculture some seasonal fluctuations in employment are inevitable, but it would doubtless be possible to spread the work more evenly over harvest periods if the scheduling of harvest operations could be made less dependent upon short-term conditions in the produce market. The hours of productive employment available per working day could, moreover, be increased to a normal workday of 7 or 8 hours by reducing the number of workers hired each morning to the minimum actually needed to complete the work scheduled for that day.[1] This regularization of employment would give the adults higher earnings, thereby lessening the occasion for employment of young children. It would also mean much more efficient use of the Nation's supply of farm labor. Clearly needed also are such changes in organization as to permit increases in farm wages to make them more nearly comparable to the wages of workers in other industries. In addition, unemployment-compensation systems should be extended to cover farm workers, and public-assistance measures should be revised to meet the needs not only of families resident the year round in one locality but of those migrating for work.

Before child-labor standards were established to safeguard boys and girls employed in manufacturing, young children customarily worked in factories at hard, repetitive jobs for very low pay. Often they spent many hours a day in connection with their jobs and did not have adequate lunch or rest periods. Today these same conditions characterize the work of children in specialized farming. In agriculture, as in manufacturing the protection of children against exploitation will depend upon the establishment of minimum-age, maximum-hour, and minimum-wage standards. The need to apply such safeguards to boys and girls working in agriculture is particularly great in this war period, when increasing numbers of children are being called on to take the place of adult farm workers who have gone into war industries or the armed forces. Child-labor conditions such

[1] At the time of the study, larger crews than could be given a full day's work were often hired in order to assure prompt delivery of the crops to the packing sheds. See pp. 27–28.

as those found in this study must not be permitted in emergency programs organized to meet wartime needs for farm labor, if the young workers are to be protected and if a high labor turn-over, with accompanying loss of productive efficiency, is to be prevented.

Measures designed to increase school attendance and exclude school-age children from employment at times when schools are in session are greatly needed, if all children of farm laborers are to share the rights and privileges that other children of the Nation may enjoy. At present the flexibility of many State compulsory-school-attendance laws permits wide exemptions from school attendance for children of school age, and the enforcement of these laws is much less adequate in some States and communities than in others. Any effort to bring all children into school must, therefore, include a strengthening of both the State compulsory-school-attendance laws and the enforcement procedures in local communities. Another urgent requirement is modification in school programs and curricula to meet the needs and hold the interest of children whose attendance is interrupted by employment and who come from groups with a language background different from that of the English-speaking community. Such modification would do much to encourage attendance.

A broad expansion in school facilities and teaching staffs will also be necessary, since many schools attended by children of agricultural workers are already overcrowded and inadequately equipped. The manner in which the schools are financed has a direct relation to this problem. In States where State aid to the schools is apportioned on the basis of the number of children included in the school census, these funds, intended by law to be used for all children in the community, are often used to provide an education only for the smaller, more privileged group actually attending school. A financial incentive to expand school facilities and to bring more of the children into school would be furnished if the funds were apportioned instead on the basis of the average daily attendance, as is now done in a considerable number of States. Additional aid from the States or supplementary aid from the Federal Government will also be required, however, in localities with small financial resources, to make possible adequate school opportunities for all school-age children.

The emphasis on health and physical fitness arising from wartime needs for manpower gives particular significance to the inadequate diets, the lack of sanitation and health protection, the frequent illnesses, and the high infant and child death rates found among agricultural workers' families. Higher earnings and more adequate relief measures would help to protect the health of these workers and their children, by providing better food, clothing, and housing. But financial aid alone would not be enough. To safeguard the health of the community as well as to end the tragic and needless waste of the lives of young children, there is need to make available to this large group of citizens sanitation, a safe water supply, sufficient medical services, and health education.

Although over the Nation as a whole great advances have been made in observing child-labor and school-attendance standards and in providing needed public assistance and health protection, it is significant that these have not reached agricultural laborers to an appreciable extent in so important an agricultural area as Hidalgo County, Tex.

Solution of these problems is primarily a matter for State and community initiative, but it is a responsibility that in the last analysis every community, State, and organized group in the Nation must share.

Today this country with other free peoples the world over is fighting to preserve the democratic way of life. The fact that many children of farm laborers in Hidalgo County and other agricultural areas are growing up deprived of minimum economic and social opportunities makes a great gap in the foundations of democracy. If democratic ideals are to be a reality, our Nation must assume fuller responsibility for the schooling, health, and welfare of all its citizens. It must promise its children that they will be called upon to leave school or to carry the double burden of school and work only to the extent demanded by the vital manpower needs of the Nation, and that boys and girls who go to work will be safeguarded against unduly long working hours or other conditions that imperil their health or well-being. As President Roosevelt said in addressing the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy in January 1940: ". . . If anywhere in the country any child lacks opportunity for home life, for health protection, for education, for moral or spiritual development, the strength of the Nation and its ability to cherish and advance the principles of democracy are thereby weakened."

APPENDIX A

Four Families of Agricultural Laborers

The following accounts of four families interviewed depict the pattern of living common to field laborers in Hidalgo County. They also indicate the special problems and the variations in income level that distinguished the situation of one family from another and influenced the environment of the children.

Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez, with the assistance of their children, had earned altogether $300 in the year preceding the date of interview, slightly less than the median yearly cash income of $350 for all families in the study. Their entire income came from agricultural labor in Hidalgo County and in northern and western Texas, to which they migrated in the late summer and fall months. The family was of average size, having seven members, the father and mother and five children—Antonio, who was 13; Orelia, 12; Maria, 10; Carlota, 8; and the baby girl, who was 3. Two other children had died in infancy, typical of the high rate of infant mortality in the families interviewed.

The parents in this family were eager for their children to have an education and therefore enrolled the four older ones in school as soon as they returned home from cotton picking in west Texas. They nearly always considered it necessary, however, to keep at least one of the children out of school either for work in the fields or for household duties. Mrs. Hernandez said that she herself worked in the fields as often as possible, but occasionally she had to stay home to do the laundry and mending. On the days she remained at home, one child usually accompanied the father to the fields. Generally this was Antonio, the 13-year-old boy, who had worked in 42 weeks of the preceding year. When the mother went to the fields, Orelia, the 12-year-old daughter, was needed at home to care for the house and the baby, but then Antonio went to school. The two younger children, aged 8 and 10, also worked occasionally during the school term, "to earn money for school supplies that the family could not afford to buy." All four children picked cotton during the migratory period.

In the 1940-41 school year, the four school-age children enrolled late in November. The three older ones all withdrew before April 1, after attending between 60 and 65 days, or only about half the minimum number of days specified by the Texas compulsory-school-attendance law. Eight-year-old Carlota stayed in school until May 9, but her total attendance for the year was nevertheless only 96 days. The teacher reported that the three older children were good "B" students, but commented that they were retarded owing to their "language handicap and poor attendance because of work." These three children had enrolled in school in 4 different years, but each was still in the first grade with Carlota, who had enrolled in 2 different years.

The family's main source of employment in the winter, spring, and early summer months was harvesting vegetables, although Mr. Hernandez occasionally did a few days' work as general farm laborer. During the vegetable season, all members of the family were usually away from home excessively long hours on the days when they went to the fields. Their labor contractor generally called for them at 8 o'clock in the morning and brought them home at 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening. Occasionally, when work was good and they did not have to go to several fields in 1 day, they arrived home earlier.

In July and August the family picked cotton in Hidalgo County. Then, early in September, they migrated with their labor contractor in his truck to pick cotton in west Texas. In 1940 they first stopped to work for about a month in Wharton County, a distance of somewhat less than 300 miles from home. From there they proceeded to Jones County, a distance of some 400 miles farther to the northwest, where they worked until the middle of November. During this trip the family found comparatively steady employment. They reported that their poorest workweek during the time away from home was one in which they missed 3 days because the weather was cold and because "the cotton was green and picking was slow." Like many other families in the study, the Hernandez family earned a considerable part of their annual income during the migratory period. In the preceding year they earned $144 during the 12 weeks in which they were away from home, nearly half their total income for the year, though their 9 weeks of cotton picking in Hidalgo County netted them but $36. From their earnings in the migratory period, they saved $60 to bring home with them.

Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez had managed to buy the one-room shack in which they lived, and also the land on which the house stood. Consequently the only expense they had for housing was the yearly taxes amounting to $4.50. During the migratory period what shelter they had was provided free. A larger item in their budget was the water rent of $1 per month that they paid for the city water supplied from a spigot in their back yard. Unlike most families in the study, they did not share with neighbors either this spigot or their open-pit privy.

In spite of the small sum paid for housing, the family had a difficult time making ends meet on their meager income. In emphasizing the need they felt for the assistance of the children, the mother said: "My husband is 51 and getting old, and it is constantly more difficult for him to get work." She added: "We are always in debt. The only time we can pay up is after we return from cotton picking in west Texas, after all of us have worked steadily for several months."

Pedro and Olivia Moreno and their four young children, on the other hand, did not migrate but depended wholly upon agricultural labor in Hidalgo County for a living. Their yearly earnings, like those of most other nonmigrant families, were considerably less than the average for all families in the study. This was due to the fact that they remained in Hidalgo County during September, October, and November when little employment was available there, while the migrants found comparatively full employment in the cotton fields of north and west Texas. The Morenos' income during the past year was further reduced by the illness of the mother, who was usually a regular wage earner but who, for a whole year before July 1940, had been unable to work. Furthermore, although the parents considered the earnings of the two older children—Virginia, aged 11, and Tomas, aged 8—indispensable, the contribution that these two young children were able to make to the family income was much smaller than that usually made by older working children in other families.

The total amount that this family of six members had to live on during the year preceding the study was about $180. They earned a little less than half

this sum picking cotton in July and August, when Virginia and Tomas regularly went to the fields with their parents. Most of the remainder was earned in the vegetable and strawberry harvests from December to June, during which time the children often worked on Saturdays and also on at least 1 school day each week. In the fall months of slack employment, all the income the family had was an occasional dollar that the father earned hoeing, irrigating, or doing general farm labor. In some weeks at this season he had no work, and he could seldom find more than a couple of days' work a week.

The Moreno children entered school much earlier than most children in migratory families. According to the school record, Virginia enrolled on October 2, Tomas on October 4. But it was a constant struggle for the parents in this family to keep the children in school. For several weeks before the interview, Tomas had been absent, owing to lack of clothes; his mother said she had had to borrow clothes from the neighbors for him so that he could work in the fields. During the 1940–41 school year, Virginia attended 146 days altogether and Tomas 138 days, out of the 175 days in the school year. This was fairly good attendance as compared with that of many other children, especially in migratory families, but nevertheless, although Virginia had enrolled in 4 different school years, she was still in the second grade. Tomas had been in school 2 different years and was in the first grade.

A major concern of the Moreno family was to keep the doctor paid so that they could go back to see him. During the year when Mrs. Moreno was too ill with "a fever" to work, medical services for her had taken a large proportion of the family income. Mr. Moreno said that he, also, was sometimes too sick to work, since he suffered during damp or cold weather from severe pains in his stomach and from fever. The baby, who was 2 years old, had had "running ears" during the previous year. The father said, "We take her to the doctor whenever we have money for the fee." Two children had died when very young, one of pneumonia and the other of a "high fever."

The Morenos' home was a wretched two-room hovel made of scraps of tin and wood, with bare dirt floors and little furniture. The Morenos owned this shack but still owed $21 for the land on which it stood. The destitution of the family, even at the peak of the vegetable harvest season, was suggested by an incident that occurred during the family interview. Virginia, the oldest child, returned home with a bag of tobacco in her hand, explaining to her parents that the storekeeper had refused to exchange the tobacco for milk for the baby. Throughout the interview the baby was extremely restless—apparently hungry.

Sometimes desperate family situations resulting from the death or incapacity of the chief wage earner forced young children to quit school and assume heavy economic responsibility. Eleven-year-old Felix Coronado, for example, gave up school altogether and became a regular wage earner because of his father's long illness and eventual death and because of the lack of public assistance. His 9-year-old brother Francisco also left school to look after the still younger children while his mother worked.

The father had died of tuberculosis in June 1940, 9 months before the family was interviewed, leaving his wife with five children under 12 years of age to support. There had been two other children, who died between the ages of 1 and 2 years. The family lived in a two-room shack belonging to Mrs. Coronado's brother, for which they paid no rent. They obtained their water from the nearby irrigation ditch. During the 6 months before Mr. Coronado's death, when no one in the family was able to work, the mother said that they were "barely kept alive by food given them by relatives." She added, "We never had enough to eat, and often my husband could not eat the food given us."

A number of weeks before his death, his wife walked a distance of about 12 miles each way to the county relief office to ask for help, but none came until 2 days before he died, when she received some surplus commodities and some clothing for the children. After that, she received surplus commodities once a month until November, when the Food Stamp Plan was introduced in the county. Under this plan, families had to be able to buy $6 worth of stamps themselves to receive aid. Since Mrs. Coronado could not afford this,[1] the family received no more public assistance. During the prev-

[1] After the time of this study, provision was made for distributing food stamps free in Texas to families who could not afford to purchase them. Moreover, enabling legislation had been enacted for aid to dependent children.

ious year, Mrs. Coronado had been able to get some groceries on credit at a store belonging to the farmer on whose land they lived. However, she had not been able to pay her bill, and her credit had been cut off.

The only cash income the family had received during the year preceding the interview was $86, which Mrs. Coronado and 11-year-old Felix earned working in the fields. This was one of the smallest incomes reported by the families interviewed. In a period of 9 weeks from July to early September the two workers earned about $40 picking cotton. A month with no employment whatsoever followed, during which the baby was sick with pneumonia and the mother could not leave him. In October, Felix and his mother obtained some work transplanting cabbage, and later they harvested vegetables. Usually they worked together, but when the baby had a second attack of pneumonia in January, Felix had to work alone. Their total earnings from the beginning of October until the time of the interview in mid-March were only about $46.

Typical of a good workweek for the mother and son was the week preceding the interview. They tied beets 6 days that week. Each morning their labor contractor called for them at 7 o'clock and brought them home at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Although they usually stopped work soon after noon, they could not go home until the truck had taken all the vegetables to the packing shed and returned for the workers. During the long hours spent in the fields and traveling back and forth, they actually worked about 5½ hours each day. Their total earnings for the week were $4.50.

Mrs. Coronado said that it "broke her heart" to take Felix out of school because he wanted to go so badly and was doing so well. She added, "All through the fall he tried so hard to keep on attending, working after school and on Saturdays and going back to school after missing some days." However, when she was unable to work in January, they "gave up the struggle," and Felix did not return to school. This was his second year in school. He was in the first grade. Francisco, the 9-year-old brother, had attended school in the previous year but did not enroll in 1940–41. His mother said, "Since I was trying to give Felix a chance to attend this year, Francisco had to stay home to care for the younger children. Besides, he had no shoes."

The Flores family was one of the very few households in the study with annual incomes approximating $1,000. Their comparatively large total income, nearly three times the median income for all families interviewed, was made possible by the presence of several grown or nearly grown children, who were all regular wage earners, and by extensive nonagricultural employment.

Mr. and Mrs. Flores had eight children, ranging in age from 2 to 24 years. Two children in this family, also, had died in infancy. The regular family working force included the father and the four eldest children—Sebastian, aged 13; Miguel, 16; Bernardo, 17; and Pedro, 24. Esteban, who was 9, had also worked within the past year, but in cotton picking only.

Nearly half of the family's income of about $970 for the year preceding the study was earned picking cotton. During the peak of the cotton-harvesting season in Hidalgo County in July and August, Mr. Flores and his five older children picked cotton there, earning $90 for 7 weeks' work. They earned a much larger amount ($380), however, during the 12 weeks spent picking cotton in north and west Texas. The entire family left home late in August in a cousin's truck, which was loaded to capacity, carrying 50 persons. They followed the maturing cotton crop to the northwest part of Texas, stopping to work at three places, and returned home by the middle of November.

Outside of cotton-picking season, most of the family's income was derived from work in a vegetable packing house. During the past year, the family made $436 altogether from this work. In addition, Mr. Flores and the eldest son received $44 unemployment compensation for 4 weeks of unemployment in June and July, between the time when the work in the vegetable packing shed ended for the season and when cotton harvesting began. The family's only other income was $20 earned by two of the boys for a few weeks' work in the harvest.

Since Esteban, the 9-year-old, worked only in the cotton fields, he was able to attend school regularly after the family returned from migrating. Sebastian, his 13-year-old brother, also enrolled in school in mid-November

and attended fairly regularly, but he had to combine school and work. Each school day during the height of the vegetable season, he ran down the railroad tracks from school to the packing shed and was ready to start tying vegetables into bunches at 3:30 in the afternoon. Often he worked until midnight. Many other school children in the community similarly worked on the grounds of the packing shed under a huge arc light until late into the night. In the week previous to the family interview, Sebastian worked all 5 school days until 11 or 12 o'clock at night and earned $3.25. This boy reported nearly as many weeks of work during the year as his 16- and 17-year-old brothers. He worked in 39 weeks of the year, 19 of which he also attended school. In 4 different school years Sebastian had enrolled in school after the family returned from migrating. The school record showed his attendance for these years to be 88 days, 106 days, 105 days, and 113 days, respectively. He had not progressed beyond the second grade. His teacher reported him as a "C" student with a "language difficulty."

The older boys, Miguel, aged 16, and Bernardo, who was 17, had quit school 5 years previously when each was in only the second grade. During the vegetable season they worked at the packing shed. Miguel usually tied vegetables in bunches. In the week before the family interview, he had had much more work then usual. There was a great deal of employment at the packing shed that week, because for the preceding fortnight heavy rain had prevented vegetable harvesting in the area. On each of his 5 working days, he reported for work at 10 o'clock in the morning, when the contractors began to bring in the harvested vegetables. The work kept him at the packing shed until 12 or 1 o'clock each night, although work was not continuous durthe day but depended on the arrival of vegetables from the fields. He was paid on a piece-rate basis of 10 cents for 32 bunches of broccoli and earned $6 during the week. Bernardo worked inside the packing shed, as did his father and older brother. They crated vegetables and loaded them on cars for shipment. The previous week had been an exceptionally good workweek for Bernardo, too. He also worked on 5 days but for longer hours than his younger brother. On several workdays he did not finish until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. For this work he was paid 30 cents an hour, the minimum rate then in effect under the Fair Labor Standards Act, and earned $19.95 during the week. The extraordinary size of these individual earnings can best be judged when it is recalled that the median earnings of the families in this study during the sample workweek from the combined efforts of all workers in the household were only $6.90.

The relative prosperity of the Flores family had enabled them to build the three-room frame house in which they lived. Through an arrangement with the manager of the packing shed, who personally owned a lumberyard, they had bought the materials for their house and paid for them by weekly wage deductions of $5 or $10. They were also purchasing the land from him in a similar way. Their house had little furniture—only a couple of beds, a table, some chairs, and a stove, but it provided a more adequate and cheerful dwelling than did the homes of many of the families interviewed.

Although this family appeared to be well off in comparison with most of the others in the study, their annual income fell short of providing an adequate living. This family had only $8 per month per person to live on, an amount considerably less than the minimum of nearly $10 that the Texas Social Welfare Association regarded as necessary to provide a living at a level of health and decency.

APPENDIX B

Legal Regulation of Employment in Agriculture

Agricultural employment has as yet been little affected by the establishment of labor standards under either Federal or State laws. The only minimum-wage standard in Federal legislation specifically applicable to agriculture is that authorized in the Sugar Act of 1937. Growers producing sugarcane or sugar beets are eligible for full benefit pay-

ments under this act only if they comply with certain labor conditions, including the payment to their laborers of at least the minimum-wage rates specified by the Secretary of Agriculture. The minimum-wage provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which apply to employees in practically all interstate industries, do not, however, apply to agriculture. Nor has any State specifically established minimum wages for farm work, although 26 States and the District of Columbia have minimum-wage legislation, usually for women and minors, covering some or all other fields of employment.

Hours of employment for adults and young people over 16 working on farms have not yet been limited by any Federal or State law except one.[1] Under the Sugar Act children 14 and 15 years of age engaged in the cultivation and harvesting of sugarcane or sugar beets may not be employed more than 8 hours a day. Only three States—Nebraska, New Jersey, and Wisconsin— expressly provide hours limitations for children under 16 in some or all agricultural employment. In two other States—California and North Carolina—some agricultural employment appears to be covered. In eight other States maximum-hours provisions of the child-labor law apply to general employment, covering work in all occupations without exempting agricultural pursuits; in practice, however, these are not usually enforced as to agriculture.

The protection of children in farm work through the establishment of minimum-wage standards has gone little further. Federal regulation in this field is limited to a 14-year minimum-age provision for cultivation and harvesting of sugarcane and sugar beets in the Sugar Act, and, under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, to a 16-year minimum age for employees in agriculture subject to the act when they are legally required to attend school. As school attendance is subject only to State regulation, the application of this 16-year minimum age is dependent upon requirements in State laws for school attendance. The variations in these requirements, and the many exemptions from attendance permitted, make this provision difficult to administer, in that it requires a determination of the periods when a particular child is legally required to attend school. Furthermore, it does not set a uniform standard throughout the country for children working on farms.

In regard to the minimum-age provisions of the State child-labor laws, only nine States—California, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—specifically or impliedly cover employment in agriculture, and in five of these States the standard applies only to work during school hours. Eighteen other States have a general minimum-age provision for all types of employment during school hours, but enforcement of this provision in agriculture is weak. Furthermore, being limited in application to school hours, such provisions do not even nominally control children's employment on farms during the school-vacation periods.

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[1] Kentucky, by an act originally passed in 1912, establishes a 10-hour day, 60-hour week for females under 21 years of age in any gainful occupation except nursing and domestic service, thus nominally covering agriculture.

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